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STUDIES IN SHELLEY

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To

The Memory

of

SIR ASUTOSH MOOKERJEE

PREFACE

Most of the essays in this volume were published from time to time in different issues of the Journal of the Department of Letters, Calcutta University. They are now presented to the public in a connected form after necessary revision and co-ordination.

I take this opportunity of expressing my sense of gratitude to Mr. Syamaprasad Mookerjee, M.A., B.L., Barrister-at-Law, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Calcutta, without whose encouragement it would not have been possible for me to publish the present volume. My thanks are also due to my colleagues, specially Messrs. S. C. Ray, M.A., H. Kabir, M.A., and S. Sen, M.A., for their suggestions and also for the assistance I received from them while seeing the book through the Press. The authorities of the Calcutta University Press helped me considerably in all possible ways.

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A. K. SEN.

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INTRODUCTION

The following essays aim at tracing the influence of contemporary movements, both of thought and action, on the mind of Shelley. Modern research has dispelled many illusions about the character and personality of the poet. He is no longer " an ineffectual angel," self-isolated and self-centred, who, like his own skylark, breaks into rapturous melody only in the highest regions of poetic imagination. Nor do we now regard him as " an enchanted child " who throughout his life " retained the idiosyncracies of childhood, expanded and matured without differentiation." * More attention is now paid to the " fundamental brainstuff " of his poetry, and his position as a leader of idealistic thought has been widely recognised. In fact the poet was gifted with an intellectual alertness uncommon in a young man of his age. He came into intimate contact with all contemporary movements and drew therefrom inspiration for his poetry. His mind eagerly responded to whatever offered a new ideal of life, and there is discernible both in his poetry and his prose, a distinct tendency towards progress and growth.

Koszul † has shown that mystical tendencies of thought persisted throughout the poet's life. It is, however, a fact no less significant that for a considerable period of time, this innate idealism of his nature suffered an eclipse. Very early in life, the scientific spirit of his age and the rationalistic philosophy of Locke undermined the foundations of his faith in orthodoxy. A period of transition followed when, under the influence of the experiential school of thought, the poet began to analyse introspectively his own world of ideas. Although for some time at least his conversion to Lockian philosophy was complete, yet the philosopher's distinction between faith

* Francis Thompson, Shelley.

† Koszul, La Jeunesse de Shelley.

and reason could not satisfy him. Even when he was at Oxford, he studied Hume's philosophy with great industry and, under his influence, gradually inclined more and more towards sensationalism pure and simple. A study of Barruel had, in the meantime, opened up the entire world of materialistic thought before the poet ; and the scepticism and materialism of Freret and Voltaire, of Helvetius and D'Holbach strengthened the sceptical tendencies of this youthful thinker.* Vaughan has pointed out Shelley's indebtedness to this group of powerful thinkers in his *Early Pamphlets of Shelley*. Dissatisfied with the attenuated Deism of the Scottish philosopher, Shelley found, in the materialistic vision of the universe as a resultant of stupendous physical forces obeying the law of Necessity, a significance which he could find nowhere else. His enthusiastic admiration for Godwin strengthened, for some time at least, this tendency of thought. All this time, however, the poet had been doing violence to the innate idealism of his nature. He was suppressing one fundamental aspect of his personality simply to satisfy his reason. The reaction was swift and sure. The introspective method of Locke asserted itself once more. It revealed to him intuitive elements in the human personality which no materialism could explain, while Plato illumined his mind with visions of beauty and love which alone satisfied the yearnings and aspirations of his heart. A close study of Berkeley and Sir William Drummond strengthened this idealistic standpoint. Brett † pointed out close parallelisms of thought and diction between passages from Berkeley and Drummond on the one hand and the works of Shelley on the other. But he went too far when he sought to explain the poet's philosophy as " a view of life akin to that of Berkeley and even more closely related to that of Drummond." He lost sight of one fundamental difference between Shelley and this

* Peck, Shelley and Abbé Barruel (P.M.L.A. XXXVI, 3).

† Brett, Shelley's Relation to Berkeley and Drummond (Studies in English by Members of the University College, Toronto).

group of thinkers. In spite of images drawn from light and colour both Berkeley and Drummond recognise the external world as real. None of them regard it as a dream or an " illusion." Plato also admitted the existence of the world as a middle-term between Being and Non-Being. I have pointed out that the poet's conception of the external world as a "bubble" and a "vision," his description of Necessity as the " mother of the universe," his use of the symbol of the veil—all show interesting points of resemblance with Indian thought as represented by Sir William Jones. Shelley's love for Indian themes, his borrowings from Southey's *Curse of Kehama* and Sir William Jones's *Palace of Fortune*, his attempt to create, in his latest literary production, an atmosphere which he considered to be Indian, all go to prove that so far as this aspect of his philosophy is concerned he was more indebted to Indian thought than to Plato, Berkeley or Drummond.

A similar development is discernible in Shelley's social and political ideals as well. Dr. Peck has traced in the works of Shelley, specially in his *Declaration of Rights* and *Address to the Irish People*, obvious borrowings and adaptations from the works of Paine, Curran and other revolutionary thinkers. The poet's ideals of womanhood owed much to Wollstonecraft and Sir James Henry Lawrence's utopian romance *The Empire of the Nairs*.* But the greatest influence on the mind of Shelley as regards these social and political ideals was undoubtedly William Godwin. I cannot, however, accept the views of Dowden,† Brailsford ‡ and others on this question. Shelley was assuredly not a mere echo of Godwin. A careful study of his works clearly shows that, after some years of enthusiastic discipleship, the poet rebelled against the cold intellectualism of his erstwhile teacher. In his later works we can clearly discern a

* Walter Graham, Shelley and the Empire of Nairs (P.M.L.A., XL. 1).

† Dowden, Life of Shelley. He regards the *Prometheus Unbound* to be nothing better than a poetical version of the teachings of William Godwin.

‡ Brailsford, Shelley, Godwin and their Circle.

significant change in his outlook on life. The poet no longer went to Godwin for his ideas regarding the universal spirit of nature, or the redemption of humanity or even the fundamental principles of morality. He gradually developed an idealistic point of view and freed himself from the spell of his Mentor. Later on, the experiences of his life impressed upon him the necessity of slow gradual progress towards a distant goal. In his *Philosophical View of Reform*, the poet came down from his high pedestal of poetic vision and abstract speculation. He now became a realist and could fully recognise the limitations of human nature.

From his childhood, Shelley was profoundly impressed by the marvellous and the supernatural.* It was only natural that he should be fascinated by tales of mystery and horror by such writers as Monk Lewis, Mrs. Radcliffe, Rosa Matilda and others.† The influence of these " blue books " on his imagination specially when he wrote his prose romances has been traced with great accuracy by A. M. D. Hughes in the *Modern Language Review*, Vol. VII, and by Dr. Peck in his *Life of Shelley*, Vols. I and II.‡

When in course of time Shelley came into contact with revolutionary thought, Volney's *Ruins of Empires* presented before him a faithful picture of the fate of an iniquitous social system. From it he borrowed many details which he wove into the texture of his imaginary world in *Queen Mab*.§ Southey's *Curse of Kehama* ‖ and Sir William Jones's *Palace of Fortune* ¶ similarly left their impress on the same poem. But it was the events of the French Revolution which exerted the strongest influence on the poet during

* Dowden, Life of Shelley, I, 10.
Hogg, Life of Shelley, I, 7-8.

† Peck, Life of Shelley, I, 17.

‡ *Ibid*, I, pp. 54-57, II, Appendix A.

§ Peck, Life of Shelley, I, pp. 303 *et seq*. Kellnor, Shelley's Queen Mab and Volney's Les Ruines (Englische Studien, XII, pp. 9-40).

‖ Peck, Life of Shelley ,I, pp. 303 *et seq*.

¶ Koeppel, Shelley's Queen Mab and Sir William Jones's Palace of Fortune (Englische Studien, XXVIII, pp. 43-53).

this formative period of his life. He not only possessed a very accurate knowledge of the condition of Pre-revolutionary France but could also bring out the significance of that great movement for the progress of humanity. The events themselves left a profound impression on his mind. His interest in these Revolutionary activities, led him to depict in *Queen Mab*, *Revolt of Islam* and *Rosalind and Helen* similar situations and incidents. In fact the *Revolt of Islam* is full of conscious or unconscious adaptations from the episodes of the French Revolution. After even a cursory perusal of the poem, we always carry with us a shrewd suspicion that the desire of the poet to describe in one of his imaginative works the events of the Revolution and the cause of its failure was fulfilled in its composition.

Much of the unsympathetic criticism of Shelley's poetry has been due to sheer ignorance of the atmosphere of ideas in the midst of which the poet lived. For a just and true appreciation of his works it is absolutely necessary to study them in the light of contemporary movements. It is only then that his ideals and aspirations which formed the basis of his poetry can be fully understood. Critics have, however, very often gone to the other extreme of regarding Shelley as dominated by one or other of his Mentors during the different stages of his mental development. Godwin, Hume, Plato, Berkeley and Drummond—they have all been represented as successive guiding stars of Shelley's life. A careful study of the poet's works, however, clearly reveals the fact that he was too independent a thinker to be a mere exponent of other people's ideas. On the contrary he condemned in no uncertain terms that servile homage to authority which happened to be one of the most prominent characteristics of his age. He refused, to quote his own words, to " assume entire opinions and, in the expression of these opinions, entire phrases " when he wanted to philosophise. He sincerely desired to assimilate new ideas with which he came into contact. Sometimes he modified them according to his own ideals. But whenever he was convinced of the in-

adequacy of any particular point of view to satisfy his reason he never hesitated to reject it ruthlessly.

Shelley was fully conscious of the fundamental principles of artistic creation. We never find in the poetry of his maturer years any the slightest tinge of didacticism. His world of beauty seems, indeed, to be entirely isolated from the everyday experiences of life. Yet underlying the symbolism and splendid imagery of his poetry there is always a firm foundation of ideas and principles. It is they which prevent his poems from losing contact with the common joys and sorrows of man. In fact, Shelley must be recognised not only as an artist who conjures up before our imagination a visionary realm of beauty but also as an independent thinker who can create, out of materials derived from contemporary movements, a world of ideas with a value and siginificance all its own.

STUDIES IN SHELLEY

I.

LOCKE, HUME AND SHELLEY

Introduction.

"It is most true that the majority of mankind are Christians only in name; their religion has no reality. So little, indeed, that they almost confess the world to be the only reason for their yet retaining their mummeries." So wrote Shelley to Thomas Jefferson Hogg as early as May 17, 1811. In fact, the common run of Christians were in those days satisfied with a placid sort of belief in the tenets of their faith. They had no religious enthusiasm nor were they actuated by that intellectual honesty which can sacrifice the world for the sake of sincere beliefs. Conformity was the great criterion of respectability and few had the courage to challenge the opinion of the world.

Shelley's own family belonged to this orthodox group. His father based his religious opinions on Paley and looked askance even at Locke. He had read Locke in his youth but had never been influenced by his standpoint.* He might allow the impossibility of preternatural interference by Providence, and, therefore, of legendary miracles; but when his son sought to apply these very principles accepted by himself he would silence him with "the equine argument 'I believe because I do believe.'" † His mother, his sister, even his *fiancé*, living as they did in the midst of such an environment, could not but regard traditional principles

* Shelley, Letters (Jan. 7, 1811).
† " " (Jan. 11, 1811).

as sacred, and shrank from the slightest tinge of scepticism. It is only natural that the earliest literary works of the poet should be considerably influenced by this atmosphere of ideas. Both *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne* are steeped in the traditional ideas of faith and morality. Shelley was now as orthodox as the commonest Christian of his age. He was eager to contemplate the works of God in order that he might pronounce them to be good. It is, according to him, only when the mind of man turns away from virtue that it cannot appreciate the wisdom and justice of Providence. " In proportion as human nature departs from virtue, so far are they also from being able to contemplate the wonderful operations, the mysterious ways, of Providence."* Constancy in love,† the inviolability of the marriage bond,‡ and the torments of impiety are familiar themes which the poet described with all the vehemence of orthodoxy. Left to solitude, Matilda, the heroine of *Zastrozzi*, broods over her gloomy thoughts and, all on a sudden, acknowledges in her inmost soul the utter falsity of the arguments which had made her an unbeliever. Like the saints and martyrs of the days of early Christianity, Matilda also sees a vision and dreams a dream and her mystic vision shows unmistakable traces of the influence of orthodox ideals on the mind of the poet.

" Strangely brilliant and silver clouds seemed to flit before her sight ; celestial music, enchanting as the harmony of the spheres, serened her soul, and, for an instant, her situation forgotten, she lay entranced. On a sudden the music ceased ; the azure concavity of heaven opened at the zenith, and a Being whose countenance beamed with unutterable beneficence descended.

" It seemed to be clothed in a transparent robe of flowing silver ; its eyes scintillated with superhuman brilliancy, whilst her dream imitating reality almost to exactness, caused the entranced Matilda to suppose that it addressed her in these words.

* Zastrozzi, Chapter VIII.
† *Ibid*, Chapter VIII.
‡ *Ibid*, Chapter XV.

" ' Poor sinning Matilda ! repent, it is not yet too late—God's mercy is unbounded. Repent, and thou mayest yet be saved.' " *

The entire atmosphere of this entrancing dream is reminiscent of Bunyan in his Pilgrim's Progress. The call to repentance, the benign countenance of the Redeemer, the celestial music are all essentially orthodox.

Equally orthodox is the account that Shelley gave of the redemption of the penitent sinner. The agony of remorse, the fervent prayer for forgiveness and mercy, the tears of repentance and the tranquillity that accompanies the belief that our prayers have been heard,—all belong to the hoary traditions of the Orthodox Christian Church. The description of the " All-benevolent of Heaven " ever responsive to the cry of the penitent heart is, certainly, a very faithful representation of the Merciful Father of Christianity. †

The same atmosphere persists in the next novel of Shelley, *St. Irvyne or the Rosicrucian*. Apart from orthodox social ideals on marriage and other institutions, what attracts the attention of the reader most is the lurid picture the poet drew of the consequences of impiety. Time and again, the youthful novelist spoke of the " dreadful day of retribution " when, in the right orthodox manner, " endless damnation " would yawn beneath the feet of an impious man and he would shrink from " eternal punishment before the tribunal of that God whom he had insulted." It is very significant to observe that this very doctrine of eternal punishment was one which Shelley could never tolerate in his later life and it was against this doctrine that he protested in his poetical as well as prose works. The pathetic confession of Ginotti reveals the torments through which a disbeliever has to pass for his denial of God. The dreadful visions of Ginotti, the lowering precipices through which he had to pass in his dreams, the dark gloomy clouds, the tempestuous atmosphere, the hideous and detestable countenance of Satan himself—all

* Zastrozzi, Chapter XVI.
† *Ibid*, Chapter XVI.

create a situation awe-inspiring and terrible. The atonement and the final overthrow of Satan remind us of Mediæval legendary incidents associated with Doctor Faustus and other audacious spirits.*

There was, however, scepticism in the air. Side by side with traditionalism, there was growing up a spirit of enquiry, criticism and analysis which could not rest satisfied with the blind acceptance of orthodox principles. Strengthened by the critical method of Locke and the cautious scepticism of Hume this tendency wielded a very great influence, not only on philosophers and men of letters but on men of culture as well. They must probe and ponder, analyse and discuss, before they could accept any new idea or new principle. Verbal disputations could not satisfy them, nor could appeals to authority, however sacrosanct, cow them down into submission. The progress of scientific investigations and the new philosophy of the Encyclopædists further stimulated this scepticism. The younger group of thinkers and poets were specially attracted to this school of sceptical thought both in England and in France.

In spite of his firm belief in orthodox principles, Shelley, living as he did in intimate contact, either through their works or otherwise, with thinkers who were sceptical in their outlook in philosophy, could not but be considerably influenced by them. The success of science and the close identification of scientists with scepticism had for Shelley a significance which we, at this distance of time, cannot possibly comprehend. One of the most cogent arguments which the poet introduced for the purpose of disproving the immortality of the soul is of peculiar interest in this connection. "Some philosophers—and those to whom we are indebted for the most stupendous discoveries in physical science, suppose, on the contrary, that intelligence is the mere result of certain combinations of the particles of its object."† The only thing which invests such a materialistic view with a peculiar

* Shelley, St. Irvyne, Conclusion.
† Shelley, On a Future State.

authority of its own is the simple fact that it has the support of persons eminent for their success in the scientific investigation of truth.

Very early in life the imaginative temperament of Shelley was attracted towards science which seemed to open up before him unending vistas of human progress. His passion for the marvellous and the supernatural which made him admire "the wildest and most extravagant romances" was not without its influence in other directions as well. Ancient books on chemistry and magic were read with "an enthusiasm of wonder almost amounting to belief" * and we have in Hogg's Life of Shelley interesting accounts of his early adventures in connection with scientific experiments.† This interest in scientific experiments of the sensational type was further strengthened, in spite of the opposition of tutors‡ and other authorities, during his residence at Eton and Oxford. The scientific spirit of the age was thus instilled, consciously or unconsciously, in the mind of the poet. A desire for unveiling the mysteries of the universe became the ruling passion of his mind and through its influence Shelley imbibed that spirit of scientific inquisitiveness which afterwards led him to metaphysical speculations dealing with the ultimate problems of life. This scientific spirit, again, was, to a very great extent, responsible, for a greater flexibility of mind which was one of his characteristics in later life. During the first part of his life, however, the poet found a new interest in the questioning spirit of scepticism. In *St. Irvyne* and *Zastrozzi* Shelley appeared as an uncompromising supporter of orthodox principles; yet Zastrozzi himself, in spite of all his atheism and other crimes, is invested with a dignity of his own. In the greatest crisis of his life he shows an indomitable will and a calm resignation to his fate which excite the admiration not only of his audience but of his judges as well. His dignified attitude and dauntless composure appeal strangely to everyone who witnesses his death.

* Shelley, Letter to William Godwin (Jan. 10, 1812).
† Hogg, Life of Shelley (I, 7-8).
‡ Medwin, Life of Shelley (I, 45).

His manner silences the tumultuous multitude and, unappalled even by the prospect of death, he stands towering as a veritable demi-god before the populace who have come to gloat over his punishment. In sad contrast to the magnificent personality of this atheist cowers Matilda, the meek believer in Providence, trembling and " fainting with dizzy horror " on the slightest pretext and over-anxious to preach her newly-discovered faith.* In fact, the way in which Shelley invested the sceptic with all the splendid powers of a hero shows the bent of his mind at that particular period of his life. Though even then a firm believer in traditional principles, his imagination plainly showed a peculiar fascination for the proud defiance of sceptical thought.

The mind of Shelley thus acquired, during the most formative period of his life, an interest in speculations of all types. In Oxford this tendency was gradually directed towards metaphysical discussions. The enthusiasm and solemnity with which he approached metaphysical problems of the day always attracted the notice of his fellow-students and specially of his friends and acquaintances. Thomas Jefferson Hogg, one of his earliest and most intimate friends at Oxford, was, from the very first, surprised at the poet's interest in philosophical speculations. " ' Aye, Metaphysics,' Shelley would often say in a solemn tone and mysterious air ; then rising from the chair, he would pace slowly about the room with prodigious strides and discourse of the soul with still greater animation and vehemence—of a future state and specially of a former state—of personal identity and also of ethical philosophy in a deep and earnest tone of elevated morality." †

It has been often affirmed that Shelley was drawn towards scepticism by the opportunities which such a system afforded to youthful enthusiasts to challenge and controvert current opinions and traditional principles. Youthful bravado, in the opinion of some critics, was responsible for

* Zastrozzi, Chapters XVI and XVII.

† Hogg, Life of Shelley (also Shelley in England, Ch. I).

much of what Shelley did in those days of disputation and controversy. The poet, we are reminded, was an eager, bold and unwearied disputant and consequently materialism appealed to him as a novel system of thought which profoundly disturbed the self-complacency of orthodoxy.*

" The sceptical philosophy had another charm," writes Medwin, one of the earliest biographers of Shelley, " it partook of the new and the wonderful, inasmuch as it called into doubt, and seemed to place in jeopardy during the joyous hours of disputation many important practical conclusions."

It has also been frequently asserted that one of the reasons which made the poet turn towards scepticism was the exuberance and self-sufficiency of youth. With the enthusiasm of an evangelical preacher, Medwin points out that scepticism can be the creed of those philosophers alone who " are distinguished by a sterility of soul, a barrenness of invention, a total dearth of fancy, and a scanty stock of learning." It readily finds followers among the youth for, " they are alone sensible that they possess the requisite qualifications for entering the school and are as far advanced as their master." This interpretation of the life of Shelley does not, however, take into consideration the difficulties through which Shelley had to pass and the persecutions he had to endure for the sake of his opinions. He was, from the very beginning, attacked for his " detestable " principles, regarded as an outcast by his family † and finally expelled from the University. Yet in the midst of all these misfortunes of life the youthful Shelley remained true to his convictions. " Youthful audacity," " love of disputations "— these are mere surmises which cannot explain his proud defiance and contempt for the " ineffectual attempts " of his relatives to frighten him into submission,‡ nor can they account for his dignified refusal of his father's offer even after he had been cast adrift into the world all friendless and alone.§

* Medwin, Life of Shelley.
† Shelley, Letter to Hogg (Dec. 20, 1810).
‡ Shelley, Letter to Hogg (Dec. 20, 1810).
§ Shelley, Letter to Sir Timothy Shelley (April 5, 1811).

His letter to Sir Timothy Shelley reveals the true situation. The poet was no flippant dabbler in metaphysics; he did not accept sceptical principles simply to show off his originality. On the contrary, his was a mind which was ever alert in its pursuit of truth, ever eager to discover new ideas and new principles. This intellectual alertness was further strengthened by an intellectual honesty which urged him to endure all hardships for the sake of his cherished principles. It was the " shocking absurdities of the popular philosophy of mind and matter, its consequences in morals and their violent dogmatism concerning the source of all things " which made him a sceptic and conducted him, very early in life, to materialism.* This is, indeed his own confession and nothing else can explain his attitude towards these problems during the whole course of his youthful career either at College or, after his expulsion, in the solitude of populous London.

The methods of analysis and observation which Shelley had formed at Oxford received a great impetus by his idea that each individual is a missionary of his own principles. From his early age he had begun to communicate his thoughts to individuals known or unknown to him. Originally he confined himself to scientific questions, but, in course of time, metaphysics " usurped the place in his affections." These epistolary controversies, Hogg affirms, should never be regarded as mere recreations of his intellect. " In briefly describing the nature of Shelley's epistolary contentions, the impression that they were conducted on his part, with frivolity or any unseemly levity, would be most erroneous; his whole frame of mind was grave, earnest and anxious, and his deportment was reverential with an edification reaching beyond his age." In fact, " the meek seriousness of Shelley was redolent of those good old times, before mankind had been despoiled of a main ingredient in the composition of happiness, a well directed veneration."

* Shelley, On Life.

Locke had already created a commotion in the world of English thought by his philosophical theories. His challenge to authority and his defence of reason had profoundly disturbed the placid contentment of philosophers and thinkers. His analysis of the human understanding and his attempt to develop a system of thought based on human experience had already created a new school of philosophy in England. Discussions on the Lockian principles of epistemology had led Hume to a more sceptical position, and his discourses and enquiries had, by their very originality, attracted the notice of robust intellects. In the University of Oxford itself there were constant discussions among the undergraduates regarding these new ideas of Locke and Hume and we may well imagine with what avidity and enthusiasm Shelley would take part in them. "We had," Hogg writes in his Life of *Shelley*, "read together several metaphysical works that were in vogue at that time such as Locke *On the Human Understanding*, Hume's *Essays*, of which we made a very careful analysis." "I read," wrote Shelley to Godwin on June 3, 1812, "Locke, Hume, Reid and whatever metaphysics came in my way, without, however, renouncing poetry, an attachment which has characterised all my wanderings and changes." Medwin in his life of Shelley gives us an interesting picture of the poet as a disputant in the discussions so frequently held among the students of Oxford. Shelley was, according to him, a bold, eager and unwearied controversialist who would frequently "exercise his ingenuity in long discussions respecting various questions on Logic and more frequently indulge in metaphysical enquiries."

It was only natural that the greatest influence on Shelley's mind should be, specially during the early formative period of his life, Locke and Hume. So great was his veneration for Locke that "the examination of a chapter of Locke's *Essay Concerning the Human Understanding* would induce him, at any moment, to quit every other pursuit."* Locke was "the systematic cudgel

* Medwin, Life of Shelley.

for blockheads " * which the poet did not scruple to try even on his father. Not only so, whenever Shelley wanted to convert any one to his own philosophy he would refer him to the same authority.† He not only accepted the Lockian doctrine of the non-existence of innate ideas but based all his theological discussions on this single principle;‡ and he would fain try to dispel all prejudices and " inextricably ' fatuous ' enthusiasm " whether in religion, or in politics, or in morality, by pointing out to his antagonist in the controversy the cogency of Locke's arguments in that famous chapter on enthusiasm in his *Essay Concerning the Human Understanding*.§ Equally profound was the impression left by Hume's Essays on the mind of Shelley. During his residence at Oxford the poet read and re-read the Essays of Hume. So much attracted was he to the metaphysical speculations of this philosopher that he would, almost always, try to refute the traditional principles of theology by " putting forward in argument the doctrines that Hume upheld.‖ In fact, Shelley identified himself with the standpoint of Hume so completely that " a stranger who had chanced to have been present at some of his discussions, or who only knew him from having read some of his short argumentative essays would have said, ' surely the soul of Hume passed by transmigration into the body of that eloquent young man, or rather, he represents one of the enthusiastic and animated materialists of the French School, whom revolutionary violence lately intercepted in an early age in his philosophical career."¶

The ideas which Shelley imbibed from his study of Locke and Hume were expressed, consciously or unconsciously, in the writings of the poet belonging to this early period of his life. One of his earliest poems, *The Wandering Jew*, sent

* Shelley, Letter to Hogg (January 17, 1811).
† Shelley, Letter to Elizabeth Hitchener (Jan. 5, 1811).
‡ Shelley, Letter to Elizabeth Hitchener (June 11, 1811).
§ Shelley, Letter to Hogg (July 4, 1811).
‖ Hogg, Life of Shelley (also Shelley in England, Ch. III).
¶ Hogg, Life of Shelley.

for publication to Messrs. Ballantyne & Co., Edinburgh, was refused by them as, in their opinion, it contained atheistical principles unfit for publication.* Shelley was, indeed, greatly surprised as he was absolutely unconscious of having expressed in it any sceptical doctrines. While requesting Stockdale to publish the poem, Shelley significantly pointed out the impossibility of inculcating pernicious doctrines in "a poem.....so totally abstract from any circumstances which occur under the possible view of mankind."† The same influence was responsible for his resolve to write a novel so constructed as to convey metaphysical and political opinions by way of conversation.‡ The novel was sent for publication to Munday and Slatter, the Oxford printers of Shelley's *Posthumous Works of Margaret Nicholson* but its printing was stopped "in consequence of their discovering that he had woven free opinions throughout his work."§

In the meantime, Shelley's sceptical principles and the methods he used for promulgating them attracted the notice of the well-wishers of his family. As early as 1810 Stockdale, the Oxford Publisher was compelled by his recent activities to give some delicate hints to Sir Timothy Shelley regarding the poet's "predispositions against revealed religion." The well-meaning Baronet, in his own blundering way, proceeded to exercise from his son's mind the spirit of scepticism. "My father," wrote Shelley to Hogg on December 20, 1810, "wrote me and I am now surrounded, environed by dangers to which compared the devils who besieged St. Anthony were all inefficient. They attack me for my detestable principles; I am reckoned an outcast." Again, "My mother imagines me to be on the high-road to Pandemonium, she fancies I want to make a deistical coterie of all my sisters."‖ The disapproval and censure of his family

* Hogg, Life of Shelley.
† Shelley, Letter to Stockdale (Sept. 28, 1810).
‡ Shelley, Letter to Stockdale (Dec. 18, 1810).
§ Montgomery, Oxford (Quoted by Ingpen, Letters of Shelley, Vol. I, p. 18, Notes.
‖ Shelley, Letter to Hogg (Jan. 11, 1811).

Shelley endured with calm and dignified resignation. He defied them and laughed at their ineffectual efforts. His father might threaten to withdraw him from College; there might lower a terrific tempest of domestic unhappiness; yet he remained unmoved. He stood "as it were, on a pharos and smiled exultingly at the vain beatings of the billows below."* When, however, Harriet Grove joined the orthodox group and began to despise him for his sceptical opinions, his paroxysm of resentment against the established religion of the age knew no bounds; it was unrestrained by any consideration of propriety or good sense. It is not necessary to quote from his letters incoherent diatribes against bigotry and intolerance as represented by the Christian Church of his days. "The expiring yell of intolerance."† "superstitious bigotry," and similar phrases on the one hand, and, on the other, his impatient determination to destroy the opinion which can annihilate the dearest of "ties,"‡ reiterated again and again in almost all the letters of this period, give us a very good idea of the storm of passions which was then passing through his mind.

Orthodox beliefs, however, die very hard. And in the life of Shelley there is discernible a period of transition, of doubt and hesitation. His unhappiness might be excessive; he might pass through miseries which awakened in him thoughts of vengeance, yet he still clung to belief in a God "whose mercy is great." He would fain open his heart to this merciful God but he dared not do so.§ He tried to conceive to himself a Being "the soul of the universe, its intelligent and necessarily beneficent actuating principle" and considered it impossible not to believe in such a spirit. He confessed, indeed, that he could not, specially after studying Hume and other philosophers belonging to the same school, adduce proofs, but it appeared to him that "the

* Shelley, Letter to Hogg (Dec. 20, 1810).
† Shelley, Letter to Hogg (Dec. 26, 1810).
‡ Shelley, Letter to Hogg (Dec. 20, 1810).
§ Shelley, Letter to Hogg (Dec. 26, 1810).

leaf of a tree, the meanest insect on which we trample, are, in themselves, arguments more conclusive than any which can be advanced, that some vast intellect animates infinity."* There is, in the theological speculations of Shelley during this stage of his mental development, a note of hesitation which gives us a faithful picture of the crisis through which the poet was then passing. Bewildered by sceptical arguments yet loth to give up the cherished beliefs of his early age, eager to believe but acutely conscious of the difficulties of the orthodox position, Shelley now lamented for his doubts and ardently wished that the whole question might be decided one way or the other. "But heaven, eternity and love!" so he wrote to Hogg on January 12, 1811, "I am yet a sceptic on these subjects. Would that I could believe them to be, as they are represented; would that I could totally disbelieve them." After a sincere attempt to prove the existence of the Deity and His care for the present happiness of His creation, the young sceptic cries out in the anguish of his heart, "Oh that this Deity were the soul of the universe, the spirit of universal, imperishable love." He indeed believed in it but his belief was fast losing its ground and he was vainly attempting to discover a secure foundation for his faith. A month passed, and on February 13, 1811, the same Shelley, so eager to believe, wrote to Graham sending him a book and requesting him to "be particularly intent on it." "Cut out the title-page and advertise it in eight famous papers;" the poet instructed his friend. He was now equally eager to proclaim to the world his new faith in *The Necessity of Atheism.*

The same note of hesitation marks his discussions on the Future State which he then carried on with his friends and acquaintances. The arguments of the sceptical school of philosophy made a profound impression on his mind and shook to its very foundations his belief in the immortality of the soul. "All that natural reason enables us to discover is that we now *are*, that there was a time when we were not; that the moment even when we now are reasoning is a point

* Shelley, Letter to Hogg (Jan. 3, 1811).

before and after which is eternity." Yet he could not rest satisfied with this trend of reasoning. He rather wanted to believe that the soul will, in a future existence, " begin life anew, possibly under a shape of which we have, at present no idea."* He sought to adduce in its favour arguments which might not partake of the nature of hypotheses. He reverted to this question time and again, during the next few months and his anxiety to produce incontrovertible proofs, and not mere hypotheses and assumptions, in defence of the doctrine of the immortality of the soul indicates, indeed, to what extent his previous beliefs had been shaken.† His will to believe grew stronger as the basis for such belief became more and more shaky. This inner urge to believe drove him to strange arguments and stranger hypotheses.‡ The struggle in his mind between scepticism and belief, between feeling and reason, is very pathetically expressed in a letter written to Elizabeth Hitchener on December 11, 1811. " Every day," so wrote the poet, " makes me feel more keenly that our being is eternal. Every day brings the conviction how futile, how inadequate, are all reasoning to demonstrate it. Yet are we—are these souls which measure in their circumscribed domain the distance of yon orbs—are we but bubbles which arise from the filth of a stagnant pool, merely to be again reabsorbed into the mass of its corruption? I think not, I feel not." But these were mere suppositions; the poet wanted proofs. In the conflict of his soul he plaintively asked the sister of his soul, whether she could prove it more satisfactorily.—In spite of his intellectual difficulties, Shelley was eager to demonstrate that " it is not merely one of the dogmas of an inconsistent religion though all religions have taken it for their foundation." Not only so, even after the publication of his treatise on the *Necessity of Atheism*, as late as January, 1812, he could criticise Elizabeth Hitchener for her scepticism about the eternity of the soul and inform her that

* Shelley, Letter to Elizabeth Hitchener (June 20, 1811).
† Shelley, Letter to Elizabeth Hitchener (June 25, 1811).
‡ Shelley, Letter to Elizabeth Hitchener (Nov. 24, 1811).

he entertained no doubts whatsoever about it. This over-emphasis on his faith plainly foretold that a day was not far distant when this youthful philosopher and thinker who had so long been clinging, against heavy odds, to his traditional belief in the immortality of the soul would have to succumb to the sceptical tendencies of his environment and in his essay *On a Future State* refute the very arguments on which he had formerly relied.

2

Locke and Shelley

Locke has often been regarded as the " second father of Modern Philosophy." In his early youth he had to pass through the entire course of Aristotelian scholasticism in the University of Oxford and the verbal disputations in which he had to take part left a very strong impression on his mind. Like Bacon he could not accept the formal logic which was then prevalent in the Universities. On the contrary, he found it " perplexed with obscure terms and useless questions " leading to " wrangling and ostentation " rather than to the discovery of truth. He, consequently, revolted against tradition and authority; for tradition and authority appeared to exert a very dangerous influence on the minds of men, stifling their originality and making of them mechanical slaves to irrational dogmas and " unverified assumptions." This reaction against contemporary tendencies of thought made Locke place on human personality an emphasis which was almost revolutionary. " So much as we ourselves consider and comprehend of truth and reason," he asserted time and again in his Essay, " so much we possess of real and true knowledge. The floating of other men's opinions in our brains makes us not one jot the more knowing though they happen to be true."* His anxiety to disprove the existence of innate ideas in the human mind was, to a very great

* Locke, Essay Concerning the Human Understanding (I, iv, 23).

extent, the result of a lurking fear lest the acceptance of such principles should " take men off from the use of their own reason and judgment and put them upon believing and taking upon trust without further examination."*

The only guide which the philosopher could follow was reason. Reason is the " natural revelation whereby the eternal Father and Fountain of all knowledge communicates to mankind that portion of truth which he has laid within the reach of their natural faculties."† It is " the candle of Lord set up by himself in men's minds, which it is impossible for the breath or power of man wholly to extinguish."‡ Even when, as an orthodox Christian, he accepted revelations and sought to differentiate between faith and reason, the rationalist philosopher could not forget this " candle of the Lord " in the human mind. Revelations might be true; they might convey to us knowledge of undiscovered regions which we can never discover by " the natural use of our faculties." Yet Locke never failed to point out that " revelation is *natural reason* enlarged by a new set of discoveries communicated by God immediately." Reason must vouch for its truth; it must prove beyond doubt that " it comes from God." §

Mere verbal disputations could not satisfy the critical mind of Locke. Meaningless words have, according to him, always been the bane of philosophy; they are mere " rubbish that lies in the way to knowledge." " Pressed down by an overwhelming load of such vague and unintelligible phrases " the seeker after truth has somehow to stagger on and, naturally, his progress becomes slow; and it is, according to Locke, a distinct service done to the cause of scientific thought and philosophical speculation to break up this artificial superstructure of phraseology, imposing and, at the same time, meaningless. A sincere investigator of truth should, therefore, insist upon clear and distinct ideas with " a

* Locke, Essay Concerning the Human Understanding (I, iv, 24).
† *Ibid* (IV, xix, 4).
‡ *Ibid* (IV, iii, 20).
§ Locke, Essay Concerning the Human Understanding (I, xix, 4).

determinate meaning" in all philosophical discussions. "Knowledge," he asserted, "had been certainly very much advanced in the world if the endeavours of ingenious and industrious men had not been much cumbered with the learned but frivolous use of uncouth, affected or unintelligible terms, introduced into the sciences, and there made an art of to that extent that philosophy, which is nothing but the true knowledge of things was thought unfit or uncapable to be brought into well-bred company and polite conversation." * This tyranny of words from which all thinkers and philosophers had to suffer in his age, Locke sought to oppose and destroy. It was no easy task that he laid upon himself. "Vague and insignificant forms of speech and abuse of language," so Locke lamented, "have so long passed for the mysteries of science; and hard or misapplied words, have, by prescription, such a right to be mistaken for deep learning and height of speculation that it will not be easy to persuade either those who speak or those who hear them that they are but covers of ignorance and hindrance of true knowledge." †

The methods of individual enquiry and observation that Locke initiated in the realm of philosophy gradually gathered strength and power. The scepticism of Hume and the materialism of the revolutionary school of France left a profound impression on the minds of the younger generation of poets and thinkers. They regarded Hume, Helvetius and D'Holbach as their authorities; they reproduced their arguments in their own metaphysical speculations and even thought that the works of these philosophers should be translated for the enlightenment of the common man. In the case of Shelley, however, the influence of Locke was deeper. His recognition of the human reason as the greatest instrument for the attainment of perfection was, indeed, due to a careful study of Godwin's *Political Justice*: he often borrowed his arguments from the *Systeme de la Nature* of D'Holbach and profusely quoted from other writers to

* *Ibid* (Epistle to the Reader).
† *Ibid.*

strengthen his standpoint. But the very basis of his metaphysical speculations seems to be derived from Locke rather than from any one else. Sometimes the influence of Locke was more powerful than that of Godwin himself. Even in his early youth, when the poet was practically in the leading-strings of the philosopher, the empiricism of Lockian philosophy and its denunciation of wordy disputes made the enthusiastic admirer of Godwin sharply criticise his opinions. In spite of his revolutionary ardour and democratic principles Godwin's love of classical culture impelled him to recommend " the acquisition of classical learning " as the "proper employment of youth." The answer of Shelley was characteristically reminiscent of Locke. " Words," he pointed out, " are the very things that so eminently contribute to the growth and establishment of prejudices. The learning of *words* before the mind is capable of attaching correspondent ideas to them, is like possessing machinery of which we are so unacquainted as to be in danger of misusing it." *

Like Locke again, the poet had become fully conscious of the evils which result from " annexing inadequate and improper ideas to words." In his *Speculations on Metaphysics*, the same attitude of mind, the same distaste for merely verbal disputes is plainly and markedly discernible. Critically reviewing contemporary movements of thought, Shelley, like Locke, was disheartened by the servile homage then paid to authority. Men in his age seemed to accept opinions not because they were reasonable but because they could be found ready at hand without any effort whatsoever on the part of the seeker after truth. They " combined words, combined a thousand times before." " In our minds," the poet was careful to point out, " we assume entire opinions and in the expression of these opinions entire phrases when we would philosophise. Our whole style of expression and sentiment is infected with the tritest plagiarisms. Our words are dead, our thoughts are cold and borrowed." †

* Shelley, Letter to Godwin (Jan. 29, 1812).
† Shelley, Speculations on Metaphysics (What Metaphysics are).

The *a priori* method of reasoning could never appeal to the mind of Locke ; on the contrary, the only method of metaphysical speculation he could accept in that age of scientific endeavour was one of observation and analysis. He sought to base his metaphysics on a definite science of knowledge. The philosopher, according to him, must try to find out the nature of the human understanding and define its scope before he can proceed to discuss questions of far greater import. He must determine how far the human understanding can extend its view, how far it has faculties to " attain certainty and in what cases it can only judge and guess." * Then alone will he be able to discuss metaphysical questions with real insight. This method, when applied to the human understanding, cannot, however, proceed smoothly very far. It encounters, at every step, difficulties, which it did not recognise before. The human understanding has to be studied introspectively. Man can have a definite knowledge of it only by observing the activities of his own mind. " But," observed the philosopher, " whatever be the difficulties in the way of this enquiry, whatever it be that keeps us so much in the dark to ourselves ; .....all the light we can let in upon our own minds, all the acquaintance we can make with our own understanding will not only be very pleasant but bring us great advantage in directing our thoughts in the search of other things."† And thus by directing the attention of man upon his own self and turning the light of human intellect upon its own operations Locke sought to sweep away all effete traditions and unproved assumptions. His was a " plain historical method." He would enquire " into the *original* of these *ideas*, notions or whatever else you may call them which a man observes, and is conscious to himself he has in his mind." Such an enquiry would, he believed, furnish him with all necessary information about the manner in which ideas were formed in his mind. Thus enlightened, the investigator of truth

* Locke, Essay Concerning the Human Understanding (I, i, 4).
† *Ibid* (I, i, 1).

should, according to Locke, "endeavour to show what *knowledge* the understanding hath by these ideas, the certainty, evidence, and extent of it." The ground being cleared of all theories and assumptions unsupported by facts, the philosopher will find no difficulty in determining the "nature and ground of faith or opinion." He will, then, have a definite idea of the functions and limits of the human understanding. It is only when such an accurate knowledge of the fundamental principles has been acquired that the philosopher can proceed with the deepest problems of metaphysical speculations.*

The same scientific methods of observation and analysis exerted a very great influence on the mind of Shelley as well. He did not recognise any difference between the physical sciences and metaphysical enquiries. Both must proceed on facts; both must base their conclusions, not on blind surmises, but on definitely established principles. Tacitly accepting the stand-point of Locke that philosophy involves a scientific enquiry into the functions and nature of the human understanding and, consequently, of the human mind, Shelley was careful to point out that, as in the positive sciences, rigid methods should be applied to the investigation and analysis of psychological data. "Let us contemplate *facts*; let us, in the great study of ourselves, resolutely compel the mind to a rigid consideration of itself. We are not content with conjecture, and inductions, and syllogisms in sciences regarding external objects; and in these let us also, in considering the phenomena of mind, severely collect those facts which cannot be disputed." † Like Locke, he was conscious that in such an enquiry into the nature of the human mind it is absolutely necessary to follow an introspective method. We must look into what passes within ourselves. We must observe our mental states very carefully, analyse them into their constituent elements, and thus acquire a definite idea of their nature. Metaphysics which

* Locke, Essay Concerning the Human Understanding (I, i, 3)
† Shelley, Speculations on Metaphysics (I. What Metaphysics are).

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Shelley, going one step further than Locke, regarded as an " enquiry into the things belonging to, or connected with, the *internal* nature of men " * must, by the very nature of its investigations, be based on self-observation ; and, owing to this fact alone, it must be regarded as superior to other sciences. It has, according to Shelley, this conspicuous advantage that " each student, by attentively referring to his own mind, may ascertain the authorities, upon which any assertion regarding it are supported. There can be no deception, we ourselves being the depositories of the evidence of the subject which we consider." † Equally conscious was the poet of the difficulties of such a method of enquiry. It is not easy to step aside and observe the activities of one's own mind ; nor can one, by a simple analysis of self-consciousness, gain a complete picture of one's own mental states. For the " intricate and winding chambers of our mind " are well-nigh inaccessible. Our thoughts and ideas are, more often than not, too elusive to be captured and analysed. In fact, the way in which the poet described the human mind makes one suspect that he might, consciously or unconsciously, have arrived at some vague conception of the subconscious regions of the human mind. " The shadowy and obscure caverns of mind," " pervaded with a lustre, beautifully bright indeed, but shining not beyond their portals " present us with a picture far different from what we find in treatises of philosophy prevalent in that period. They suggest, vaguely though it be, that the human mind has far other regions in the depths of its being, regions which the light of human intellect can never illuminate, regions which lie beneath the threshold of human consciousness. The task of introspection, consequently, became more difficult with the poet than with the philosopher.

In the identification of metaphysics with psychology, however, Shelley misunderstood the standpoint of Locke. Though the philosopher regarded it absolutely necessary to

* Shelley, Speculations on Metaphysics (What Metaphysics are).
† *Ibid.*

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enquire into the nature and functions of the human mind in order to arrive at a clear and definite idea about the limits of human knowledge, he was always conscious of the aim of philosophy which is the realisation of ultimate truth. He recommended psychological enquiries simply to clear the ground for metaphysical speculations. He wanted to use the introspective method to find out the extent of our comprehension and thus form a conclusive idea of the limits of metaphysical enquiries. " If by this enquiry into the nature of the understanding I can discover the powers thereof, how far they reach, to what thing they are in any degree proportionate, and where they fail us, I suppose it may be of use, to prevail with the busy mind of man to be more cautious in meddling with things exceeding its comprehension." Men will then cease to " perplex themselves and others with disputes about things to which their understandings are not suited " or of which they cannot form any distinct idea. He was, in fact, always careful to differentiate between metaphysics and psychology. But his entire *Essay* is so much occupied with questions of psychology that it was only natural for Shelley to identify the one with the other.

In spite of the difficulties of the introspective method, Shelley conformed to it from his early youth, and although in his Prose Works we do not get any formal enunciation of the different stages of this method, as we find in Locke's Essay, yet the conclusions arrived at by Shelley regarding the constitution of the human mind plainly point to such a system of introspective analysis. In his *Speculations on Morals* the poet did not rest satisfied with abstract arguments and theoretical discussions. On the contrary, he based his ideals and principles on an analysis of the human personality. He wanted to proceed further, and consider " in what manner the sensations which constitute the basis of virtue originate in the human mind ; what are the laws which it receives there ; how far the principles of mind allow it to be an attribute of a human being ; and lastly, what is the probability of persuading mankind to adopt it as a universal and systematic

motive of conduct." * Further, there is at the very beginning of this pamphlet a description of Benevolence which shows the successful use of methods of introspective analysis by the poet. Of a similar nature is the analysis of the emotions of pain and pleasure and of the virtue of justice which the poet had to develop in support of his theories. It has often been asserted that Locke was, to a very great extent, responsible for Shelley's empiricism which, later on, led to his conversion into a materialist; but it is not as often remembered that it was this introspective method of Locke which compelled him to recognise in man an element at enmity with transience and decay and reject the materialistic hypothesis as inadequate.† Shelley's idealism is as much the result of introspection as his materialism. There are again certain principles of the philosophy of Locke to which Shelley subscribed unconditionally. The very cornerstone of Locke's system was the rejection of innate ideas and a considerable portion of the first book of his Essay is devoted to a refutation of arguments in its favour. Shelley did not, however, go into details; on the contrary, it was enough for him that Locke had proved " that there are no innate speculative and practical principles." He was fully convinced of the non-existence of innate ideas. It had, he asserted, been proved beyond a shadow of doubt; for, had not Locke " challenged any one to find out any idea which is innate "? This challenge had a much greater influence on the mind of Shelley than any long discussion could have ever had. It convinced him so far that he referred to it, time and again, in his letters to Elizabeth Hitchener, the sister of his soul. It was held up to the admiration of his associates and enthusiastically proclaimed to be conclusive. This is indeed a very slender argument to rely upon for building up a system of thought; yet upon this slender basis did the young enthusiastic disciple of Locke proceed to construct his own philosophy. Not only so, this was also the foundation of Shelley's

* Shelley, Speculations on Morals (Chapter I).
† Shelley, On Life.

ideals of education. The human mind, according to the poet, is a *tabula rasa*, ready to receive any and every impression imposed upon it, and is, consequently, moulded by its environment of thoughts and ideals. In fact, all the hopes that Shelley entertained about the human millennium are entirely based upon this belief in the efficacy of education and a changed environment to transform the human personality.*

Divested of all innate ideas, the human mind, according to Locke, becomes a blank sheet of paper. Whence, then, comes all this world of thought which man builds? This vast superstructure of ideas which so powerfully influences human activities must have some basis on which it can stand; it must gather its materials from some source; that source and that basis, according to the philosopher, is human experience. It is necessary to quote the entire passage from his *Essay Concerning the Human Understanding* in order to appreciate Locke's standpoint and the great influence it exercised on the mind of the poet. " These—the impressions that are made on our senses by outward objects, that are extrinsical to the mind, and its own operations proceeding from powers intrinsical and proper to itself, which, when reflected on by itself, become also the objects of its contemplation—are, as I have said, the original of all knowledge. Thus the first capacity of the human intellect is, that the mind is fitted to receive the impressions made on it, either through the senses by outward objects or by its own operations when it reflects on them." The world of sensations and the world of mental activities—these two alone man can know : the first is imprinted on his mind by particular sensible objects, the second by reflecting on the operations of his own inner self. These give man the materials whereon he constructs his own world of thought. " All those sublime thoughts which tower above the clouds and reach as high as heaven itself, take their

* *Vide* Godwin and Shelley, Journal of the Department of Letters, Calcutta University, Vol. XX, pp. 18-19.

rise and footing here : in all that great extent wherein the mind wanders in those remote speculations it may seem to be elevated with, it stirs not one jot beyond the ideas which *sense* or *reflection* have offered for its contemplation."*

Shelley did not proceed to such detailed arguments as Locke. In his Prose Works belonging to this period of his life we do not find any such minute analysis of human knowledge ; at that youthful age he enthusiastically accepted the conclusions of the philosopher and did not probably think it necessary to recapitulate arguments which he considered to be as conclusive as self-evident truths. He had not as yet developed any accuracy in thinking ; consequently he did not differentiate between sensation and reflection as his master had done. The consciousness of impressions from external objects and the introspective reflection on the activities of one's own mind—both he designated by the common name of " perception."† Like Locke, however, the poet was fully aware of the " infinite combination," " relations," and " modes " of these ideas. His imagination was fired by this magnificent thought. He waxed eloquent when he described the world of ideas so created. He would form a graduated scale of ideas which would display " an uninterrupted chain of nicely shadowed distinctions " " from the faintest impressions of the senses, to the most distinct combination of these impressions " ‡ Any one who has the slightest acquaintance with the *Essay Concerning the Human Understanding* can, even on a superficial study of these passages, notice how full of verbal reminiscences from Locke they are. The poet had Locke in the background of his mind when he proceeded to enumerate the varied materials of our experience " from the simplest of these combinations to that *mass of knowledge* which, including our own nature, constitutes what we call the universe."§ His assertion that " the most astonishing

* Locke, Essay Concerning the Human Understanding (II, i, 24).
† Shelley, Speculations on Morals (The Mind).
‡ Shelley, Necessity of Atheism.
§ Shelley, Speculations on Metaphysics, I; *cf.* Locke, Essay (II, i, 5).

combinations of poetry, the subtlest deductions of logic and mathematics are no other than combinations which the intellect makes of sensations according to its own laws " appears to be closely modelled on a similar passage of Locke.*

Apart from these verbal reminiscences the entire metaphysical outlook of Shelley is deeply tinged by the experiential philosophy so emphatically enunciated by Locke. This was indeed the only reasonable interpretation possible—at least Shelley thought so. " By considering all knowledge as bounded by perceptions which may be indefinitely combined, we," according to the poet, " arrive at a conception of nature inexpressibly more magnificent, simple, true than accords with the ordinary systems of complicated and partial considerations. Nor does the contemplation of this universe, in this comprehensive and synthetical view exclude the subtlest analysis of its modifications and parts." The special emphasis the poet laid on " sensations " as the basis and material of knowledge, however, shows that he was already leaning towards the sensationalist school of thought. It is also remarkable that in his *Refutation of Deism* the poet, in the character of Eusebes, represented Locke as deriving all ideas from sensations thus ignoring altogether the other source of human knowledge—the ideas which man derives from reflection. He proceeded further and used this interpretation of Lockian philosophy to prove that the God of the rationalist must have an organised body. " Ideas result from sensations which can exist only in an organised body ; " " to assert that God is intelligent is to assert that he has ideas ;" *ergo*, the Deity which a rationalistic theosophist adores must be nothing else than a vast and wise animal. It is very difficult to get any definite idea of the poet's opinions from the dialogue. But the whole trend of the essay gives us the impression that his sympathies were more with the destructive criticism of Eusebes than with the Deistic standpoint of Theosophus ; and there is every reason to believe that Eusebes' interpretation of Locke was also the position at which Shelley had arrived

* *Cf.* Locke, Essay Concerning the Human Understanding (II, i, 24).

after his study of experiential philosophy. Mr. Pringle-Pattison has very pertinently pointed out that, on the strength of Locke's historical affiliation with Sensationalism, critics have very often " visited upon him the sins of his latest descendants and read into his phrases about experience a meaning intelligible only in the light of the sharper distinctions due to subsequent developments." He instances the criticism of Green and Hamilton.* Where philosophers of their standing misunderstood Locke, it was all the more natural for a young enthusiast like Shelley to fall into that common error. It must also be remembered that Hume had already made it easy for sensationalism to establish itself before Shelley ever thought or wrote about these problems of human knowledge and human ideas. The materialistic school of thought in France further strengthened this tendency in the mind of the poet and he became, to all intents and purposes, a materialist of the most pronounced type. His idealism however could never be permanently suppressed, and it has been already seen how he was, by the proper use of the introspective methods of analysis, gradually weaned away from materialism. It was only natural that, his idealism once restored through adherence to Lockian methods, he should, in that later stage, revert to other principles of Locke. He who had, in his *Necessity of Atheism* and *Refutation of Deism* regarded sensation as the only source of knowledge now accepted the Lockian standpoint.

Shelley now pointed how

> " The everlasting universe of things
> Flows through the mind, and rolls its rapid waves
> Now dark—now glittering—now reflecting gloom—
> Now lending splendour,"

while

> ....." from secret springs
> The source of human thought its tribute brings
> Of waters,—" †

* Locke, Essay Concerning the Human Understanding, ed. by Pattison, Introduction, p. xxviii.

† Shelley, Mont Blanc.

Man's world of thought is thus a mighty stream fed by two distinct tributaries, *viz.*, the sensations derived from the external world of nature and the ideas of reflection derived from the operations of the human mind.

Ideas which, according to Locke, form the basis of human knowledge, were classified by him into simple and complex. Coming into contact with the human mind through one of the senses, the qualities of the external objects, though united and blended beyond any possibility of separation as they exist in the things themselves, produce in it simple and unmixed ideas. In our world of thought, we seldom come across such simple ideas; on the contrary, the human understanding "repeats, compares, and unites them into an infinite variety."

Shelley's analysis of ideas in his *Speculations on Metaphysics* shows us very conclusively the extent to which his mind was influenced by the philosophical system developed by Locke and his school. He gave us a picture of a world of ideas in which the simple sense-impressions are graduated and combined into the mass of knowledge which we call the universe. He was also careful to point out how "combinations which the intellect makes of sensations according to its own laws" form the basis of our subtlest deductions and the most sublime heights of poetic imagination. In his analysis of such moral virtues and vices as tyranny, etc., he adopted the standpoint of Locke. Tyranny for instance, is "a *complex* idea," "one of *Locke's complex ideas*."* For Shelley was sure that any person living in his age who had the least pretension to liberal culture must understand Locke and the bare reference to the complex ideas of Locke would be enough for his enlightenment. The poet sometimes tried to analyse complex ideas into their constituent elements. In one of his letters to Elizabeth Hitchener he attempted such an analysis and triumphantly pointed out to his Portia that "the ideas of power, evil, pain, together with a very clear perception of the two latter which

* Shelley, Speculations on Metaphysics.

may almost define the idea of *hatred*, together with other minor ideas, enter into the composition of the complex idea of tyranny."

The simple ideas, Locke is careful to point out, "are suggested and furnished to the mind. The human understanding receives them passively. Them it can no more "refuse to have nor alter when they are imprinted, nor blot them out and make new ones itself than a mirror can refuse to alter or obliterate the images or ideas which the objects set before it do therein produce." * Once the materials are placed before our mind we can analyse them, classify and define them. We can even unite them according to our own will and thus build up our world of thought and imagination. But whatever be the object we create, it is nothing absolutely new but a mere combination of simple ideas. However great a man may be, his imagination and intellect must remain circumscribed by their materials derived from sensation and reflection. They "can do nothing towards the making the least particle of new matter or destroying one atom of what has been already created." The same inability man experiences when he tries to picture before himself any simple idea "not received by the senses from external objects or by reflection from the operations of his mind about them."†

A similar tendency of thought is discernible in the philosophical speculations of Shelley. The mind, according to the poet, cannot create, it can only perceive. It receives sensations from the outside world, through the organs of sense. But in the account that he gave of the constitution of the world of thought, the poet seemed to deny any activity to the human mind. The ideas "suggest" themselves; they are determined by the environment and form the elements of thought. They combine together but the poet gave no indication of the part that the mind plays in their combination. He simply asserted that "from the various combinations of these, our feelings, opinions and volitions inevitably result." "Without the

* Locke, Essay Concerning the Human Understanding (II, i, 25).
† *Ibid* (II, ii, 2).

action of external objects," so Shelley pointed out, " we should not only be deprived of all knowledge of the existence of mind, but totally incapable of the knowledge of anything ;" so that " mind deserves to be considered the effect rather than the cause of motion."* This idea of the mind as entirely passive, the mere arena for the action and interaction of ideas which combine nobody knows how, into a complex world of thought, is entirely different from Locke's standpoint. For Locke was always very careful to state that " mind has an independent and active existence of its own ;" it is " informed by the senses," takes notice of the changes in its ideas, observes and reflects on what passes in it and thus transmutes the materials of thought into ideas and concepts. The associationist theory as well as the sensationalism of contemporary philosophy was assuredly determining the poet's ideas, especially at this stage of his mental development.

Ideas, according to Locke, are the materials of our mental operations. They are the only immediate objects which mind can observe and contemplate. Knowledge being a mental operation must, necessarily, be confined to ideas alone. Mere perception of ideas, however, does not constitute knowledge. It is their mutual relation which falls within the province of knowledge. Man can be regarded as acquiring it only when he perceives the connection that subsists among them. It is, therefore " the perception of the agreement or disagreement of two ideas." When we actually perceive without the least doubt this relationship of agreement or disagreement we are said to *know* in the Lockian sense of the term. Where we fall short of absolute certainty in this respect we " may fancy, guess or believe yet we fall short of knowledge."†

The human mind, according to Locke, can and does perceive these relationships in two altogether different ways. Introspection tells us that we often perceive these relationships

* Shelley, The Refutation of Deism.

† Locke, Essay Concerning the Human Understanding (IV, i, 2).

" immediately, by themselves ;" we do so by " bare intuition ;" there are no intervening ideas, no logical syllogisms to assist us in such a perception. Intuitive knowledge of this type is the " clearest and the most certain that human frailty is capable of."* It " leaves no room for hesitation, doubt or examination but the mind is presently filled with the clear light of it." There are, however, occasions when we do not perceive immediately the agreement or disagreement of two ideas ; and we are convinced only when we discover them by a process of reasoning along a chain of intervening ideas. This type of mediate perception Locke refers to as " demonstrative knowledge." " Demonstration," he points out, " is the showing agreement or disagreement of two ideas by the intervention of one or more proofs which have a constant, immutable, and visible connection, one with another."†

The province of intuitive and demonstrative truth is indeed very narrow and circumscribed. We, in our life, have, however, to act upon propositions which belong to neither of these two categories. They are not absolutely certain but approach so near to certainty that we implicitly rely upon them in the most important affairs of our life. The proofs on which they are based have no " constant, immutable and visible connection." " The entertainment the mind gives this sort of propositions is called belief, assent, or opinion which is the admitting or receiving any proposition for true upon arguments or proofs that are found to persuade us to receive it as true without certain knowledge that it is so."‡

Shelley had no philosophical training which could analyse knowledge so minutely and classify it according to the strength of its proof. In his early Prose Pamphlets he identified belief or opinion with knowledge. He warned Lord Ellenborough against punishing individuals for their belief or disbelief ; he sought to persuade him that they, being completely " distinct from and unconnected with volition " can never be the subject

* Locke, Essay Concerning the Human Understanding (IV, ii, 1).
† *Ibid* (IV, xv, 1).
‡ *Ibid* (IV, xv, 3).

of reward or punishment. The definition of belief which he wanted to establish in this connection was a mere echo of Locke's definition of knowledge. Belief and disbelief, he reminded His Lordship, " are the *apprehension of agreement or disagreement of the ideas—which compose any proposition.*" * Theosophus similarly reminded Eusebes in his *Refutation of Deism* of the absurdity of regarding incredulity as immoral by pointing out that " truth (or belief?) is the *perception of the agreement or disagreement of ideas.*" When analysing the grounds of belief in God, Shelley, the upholder of the *Necessity of Atheism* observed sententiously : " When a proposition is offered to the mind, it perceives the agreement or disagreement of the ideas of which it is composed. A perception of their agreement is belief." The poet was certainly using the term belief to include all perceptions of agreement—immediate, mediate or contingent. It was used alike for intuitive and demonstrative knowledge as well as *the belief* of Lockian philosophy. The description which Shelley gave, of the efforts of the mind to remove obstacles which prevent the perception of agreement from being immediate and certain, reminds us of a similar passage in Locke's *Essay Concerning the Human Understanding.*† Both the passages picture the human mind as eager to perceive agreement or disagreement of two ideas, both describe it as endeavouring actively to discover these relations for which it is searching and the indebtedness of Shelley to Locke is too patent to be questioned.

Locke was very careful to point out, define and analyse the grounds of probability on which beliefs and judgments (in the Lockian sense) are based. As he differentiated between knowledge, immediate and mediate, intuitive and demonstrative, on the one hand, and belief or probable judgment on

* Shelley, Letter to Lord Ellenborough.

† Locke, Essay Concerning the Human Understanding (IV, ii, 2), and Shelley, Notes on Queen Mab, VII, 13.

the other, his conditions of assent have reference to the latter category alone. They have, accordingly been defined as two-fold : " First, the conformity of anything with our own knowledge, observation, and experience and secondly, the testimony of others vouching their observation and experience."[1] Shelley, on the contrary, used the term belief to include all types of assent and, under the influence of Hume regarded it, somewhat inconsistently, more as a passion than as a perceptive act.* He had, consequently, to include in his grounds of belief the basis of what Locke would call knowledge. It is, therefore only in the fitness of things that he should, in his *Necessity of Atheism*, postulate three bases for belief : *viz.*, (*i*) " The senses which are the sources of all knowledge to the mind ; consequently their evidence claims the strongest assent." Knowledge derived from sensation is, according to the poet, more certain than that derived from anything else. In coming to this conclusion Shelley seemed to have been more influenced by later philosophers than by Locke. Instead of regarding sensitive knowledge as certain the philosopher did not include this type of knowledge within the province of knowledge at all. He was distinctly of opinion that it could not be as certain as intuitive or even demonstrative truth ; for he was always careful to remember the points of difference among them all. " There is," he observed, " indeed another perception of the mind employed in the particular existence of finite beings without us ; which going beyond bare probability and yet not reaching perfectly to either the foregoing degrees of certainty, passes under the name of knowledge." The only thing which can be ascertained from our sensations is the existence of ideas in our mind ; and it is doubtful " whether we can thence certainly infer the existence of anything without us." The certainty that we have about these objects is not as strong as that of intuitive or demonstrative truths but it is

* *Cf.* " Belief, then is a passion " (Necessity of Atheism, *cf.* Notes on Queen Mab, VII, 13, also Letter to Lord Ellenborough).

" as great as our happiness or misery beyond which we have no concernment to know or to be." * By regarding this type of evidence as the most certain Shelley proved himself unable to appreciate the true standpoint of Locke or even understand the minute analysis of experience which formed the groundwork of his philosophy.

The second ground of belief or knowledge is, according to Shelley, " the decision of the mind, founded upon our own experience derived from these sources." This statement does not make the issues clear. It is too vague to carry any definite meaning. Does " decision of the mind " include the intuitive recognition of truth? Or does it merely denote demonstrative knowledge? The illustrations that the poet himself gave of such " decisions of the mind " under the sub-title *Reason* leave us no doubt that, at least, in the *Necessity of Atheism* he was referring to reasoning in the Lockian sense of the term. The philosopher pointed out that " though we have, here and there, a little of this clear light, some sparks of bright knowledge ; yet the greatest part of our ideas are such that we cannot discern their agreement or disagreement by an immediate comparing of them. And in all these we have need of *reasoning* and must, by discourse and inference, make our discoveries." † The whole trend of description and illustration in the *Necessity of Atheism* shows a very close approximation to this description in Locke. In fact the arguments which he refuted in this treatise were precisely those that Locke and his school adduced to prove that our knowledge of God is demonstrative.

The third ground of belief or knowledge is, according to Shelley, testimony, *i.e.*, the experience of others. The poet was, in this matter, closely following the arguments of Locke, though we miss in his bare assertion the sagacious observations with which the philosopher sought to guide future investigators of truth.

* Locke, Essay Concerning the Human Understanding (IV, ii, 14).
† Locke, *Ibid* (IV, xvii, 15).

Apart from reason, intuitive or otherwise, Locke recognised a second principle which he called Faith. An orthodox believer that he was, he sought to prove " the reasonableness of Christianity," to his contemporaries, to orthodox believers and Deists alike. Although he sought to base his Christianity on the scriptures alone, he had to accept divine revelation not only as a fact but as the very foundation of his religion. In Book III, Chapter XVI, of his *Essay* the philosopher pointed out that besides the intuitive, demonstrative and sensitive knowledge, and in addition to judgments of belief, there are " such supernatural events suitable to ends aimed at by Him who has power to change the course of nature " which must procure belief or assent though they may be contrary to ordinary observation.* There are also propositions which are above reason; they must be accepted with implicit confidence whether they represent any idea contrary to human experience or not. These are the revelations of God himself " beyond the discovery of our natural faculties " and, consequently, the " proper matter of Faith." † In spite of his orthodoxy, however, Locke could never forget his rationalistic outlook on life. Revelations might be certainly true; yet reason must judge " whether it be divine revelation or no." ‡ Man must be sure that God has really spoken before he accepts them to be true. In fact, he denounced, in no uncertain terms, " enthusiasm " which, according to him, is responsible for all the absurdities, extravagant opinions and superstitious ceremonies which disfigure the different religions of the world. Thus influenced by enthusiasm, men begin to live in a world of dreams and make-belief. " Whatever groundless opinion comes to settle itself strongly upon their fancies is an illumination from the spirit of God and presently of divine authority; and whatsoever odd action they find in themselves a strong inclination to do, that impulse is concluded to be a call or direction from heaven and

* Locke, Essay Concerning the Human Understanding (IV, xvi, 13).
† *Ibid* (IV, xviii, 7).
‡ *Ibid* (IV, xviii, 10).

must be, obeyed." * Reason is suppressed and, with its suppression revelation loses much of its value and significance.

Although his earliest romances are steeped in the atmosphere of orthodoxy Shelley could not accept in its entirety Locke's differentiation between the provinces of reason and of faith. On the contrary, as early as April 26, 1811, he twitted religionists for the undue emphasis they put on faith. He pointed out the absurdity of regarding faith as " one of the highest moral virtues," nay the very " foundation on which all others must rest." " The orthodox believers," Shelley very significantly observed, " think that he who has neglected to cultivate this has not performed one-third of his moral duties." † His notes on *Queen Mab* are mainly devoted to the task of exorcising supernaturalism from the domain of thought. The sceptical doubts which the poet so elaborately expressed against the existence of miracles,‡ or the truth of prophecies are all directed against the claims of Christianity to be based on divine revelations. The efforts of the poet in this direction were more or less due to the influence of Hume. The sceptical doubts of Hume with his solutions as sceptical as the doubts themselves, were, at this particular period of life, exercising a paramount influence on the mind of Shelley. Yet even now, the poet would often use Locke's arguments for clearing the issues. While discussing the question of individual inspiration, Shelley, in a passage reminiscent of Locke's arguments in his chapter on *Enthusiasm*, pointed out the abuses to which such an idea often gives countenance. " Admitting, however, the influence or possibility," observed Shelley, " of a divine revelation, unless we demolish all foundations of human knowledge, it is requisite that our reason should *previously demonstrate its genuineness*; for before we extinguish the steady ray of reason and common sense, it is fit that we should discover whether we cannot do without their assistance, whether or no, there

* Locke, Essay on the Human Understanding (IV, xix, 6).
† Shelley, Letter to Hogg (April 26, 1811).
‡ Shelley, Notes on Queen Mab, VII, ll. 135-36.

be any other which may suffice to guide us through the labyrinth of life! For, if a man is to be inspired on all occasions, if he is to be sure of a thing because he is sure, if the ordinary operations of the spirit are not to be considered very extraordinary modes of demonstration, if enthusiasm is to usurp the place of proof and madness that of sanity, all reasoning is superfluous." * There is an unmistakable ring of Locke in these arguments and Shelley was honest enough to indicate the source from which he had taken his materials. It was "Locke's Essay Concerning the Human Understanding, Book IV, Chapter XIX, On Enthusiasm." †

Although Hume was gradually replacing Locke in the esteem of the poet, and under his influence Shelley was leaning more and more towards sensationalism yet he recognised in his *Speculations on Metaphysics* the intuitive nature of at least a part of our knowledge. Locke had observed that "nothing can be more evident to us than our own existence. I think, I reason, I feel pleasure and pain; can any of these be more evident to me than my own existence? If I doubt of all other things, that very doubt makes me perceive my own existence and will not suffer me to doubt of that." ‡ Following very closely the arguments of the philosopher, Shelley also felt that "we are intuitively conscious of our own existence and of that connection in the train of our successive ideas which we term our identity." § In his conception of our identity as a mere connecting link rather than a substratum of our ideas, the poet, however, differed widely from the standpoint of Locke and confessed the influence of Hume as well as of the associationist school of philosophy.

In the description that Shelley gave of the manner in which we acquire a knowledge of other minds he was, consciously or unconsciously, using two distinct lines of argument

* Shelley, Notes on Queen Mab, VII, ll. 135-36.
† *Ibid.*
‡ Locke, Essay Concerning the Human Understanding (IV, ix, 3).
§ Shelley, Speculations on Metaphysics (I. The Mind).

followed by the Experiential School. According to Locke and his followers one of the reasons which compel us to believe in the existence of external objects is the fact that the sensations they produce in our mind are involuntary. The ideas of memory are indeed responsive to our will; they are recalled or laid aside, according to the sweet will of the person concerned. Not so, however, the sensations that we receive from the outside world. We feel that we cannot avoid them and hence come to the conclusion that they must be produced by some exterior cause whose efficacy we cannot resist.* Again in matters which it is very difficult to observe or experiment upon, analogy, according to Locke, " is the only help we have and from that alone we draw all grounds of probability." † Shelley combined both these arguments in his *Speculations on Metaphysics* and developed them in his own manner. " We can perceive the existence of other minds indeed, but not intuitively. The grounds of our belief in them are founded upon a very complicated relation of ideas." In our daily life we are conscious of " a periodical recurrence of masses of ideas which our voluntary determinations have, in one particular direction, no power to circumscribe or to arrest and against the recurrence of which they can only imperfectly provide." This then makes us believe in the existence of other minds. Our knowledge of their nature, however, we have to derive from analogy—a law according to which all similar deductions are made and which, Shelley admitted, " must be the foundation of all our inferences from one idea to another, inasmuch as they resemble each other."

So far as the theory of knowledge is concerned Shelley is thus found to be profoundly influenced by Locke, especially in very important aspects of his own standpoint. In fact while at Oxford he was, in certain matters, completely under the influence of Lockian Philosophy. There is, however,

* Locke, Essay Concerning the Human Understanding (IV, xi, 5).
† *Ibid* (IV, xvi, 12).

discernible, even at this early stage of his mental development, a tendency towards sensationalism which was due to the growing influence of later schools of thought both in England and in the Continent.

3

The Reaction against Locke

During Shelley's residence at Oxford, there was, as has been already pointed out, a definite development discernible in the philosophical outlook of the poet which distinctly indicated that he was already questioning the validity of Locke's position. It has been already noticed how in his conception of the human identity, in his enumeration and description of the grounds of belief and his opinions on similar problems, he was gradually developing ideas and theories completely at variance with Locke and his school. In fact, the rationalistic bias which a study of Locke had imposed on the mind of the youthful thinker was now slowly but surely leading him to question many elements in the philosophy of his master. He was being insensibly drawn towards an interpretation of Locke's theory in terms of sensationalism; and in this peculiar evolution of his mind the influence of Hume played no insignificant part.

A similar movement away from Locke and distinctly towards Hume can be clearly traced in the evolution of the poet's idea of God. In the earliest romances of Shelley, both in Zastrozzi and in the Rosicrucian (St. Irvyne) Shelley was frankly a follower of the orthodox school of theology. The arguments against the existence of a First Cause are, according to the poet, merely sophistical.* Man's soul must acknowledge their falsehood, specially during hours of adversity. There are crises in his life when he must lift up his eyes to heaven for succour and solace. He must repent and in such moments of sincerest repentance God, in his infinite

* Shelley, St. Irvyne, X.

mercy, appears before the contrite heart. "From the height of heaven, he penetrates the inmost thoughts of terrestrial hearts" and "hears the outcast sinner" as he appeals to his mercy "in tears of agonising repentance." In hours of crisis, spiritual or otherwise, "when the firmest heart must tremble at His power," man has to invoke the benevolence of his Creator; and "mercy," so the future believer in the *Necessity of Atheism* asserted, "by the All-benevolent of Heaven, is never refused to those who humbly, yet trusting in His Goodness, ask it." *

The student of Locke and Hume could not, however, remain satisfied with such dogmatic assertions of traditionary beliefs. At least he could not render unquestioning obedience to the "received opinions of the world;" nor could he accept "that superstitious bigotry upon which, at present, the world acts, of believing all that we are told as incontrovertible facts." † This rationalistic outlook on life easily led to questioning of orthodox principles which sapped the very foundations of his faith. A period of transition followed; the poet still clung to his older beliefs although he found the ground slipping from underneath his feet; and it is very significant that the arguments by which he sought to strengthen his faith bore a very close resemblance to the theological speculations of Locke.

Locke based his arguments regarding the existence of God on the "causal maxim that everything which has a beginning must have a cause." ‡ We cannot predicate anything of a 'non-entity' much less regard it as an active principle producing a real being. It naturally follows as an evident demonstration that there must be some Eternal Being, "since what was not from eternity must have a beginning; and what had a beginning must be produced by something else." Moreover man is intuitively conscious of his own self; he has an "intuitive, infallible perception of his being." In

* Shelley, Zastrozzi, XVI.
† Shelley, Letter to Hogg (Dec. 23, 1810).
‡ Locke, Essay Concerning the Human Understanding (X, 3).

every one of his acts he knows with the highest degree of certainty " that he is something and not a non-entity."* The very existence of individual conscious subject, however, presupposes the demonstrative certainty (as Locke would have it) of the existence of a Being " who is eternal and from whom human personality derives its powers." Thus from the consideration of ourselves and what we infallibly find in our own constitutions, our reason leads us to the knowledge of this certain and evident truth, that there is an eternal, most powerful and most knowing Being.† This is, indeed, the very cornerstone of Locke's belief in God. He, however, indirectly took cognisance of another argument when, referring to persons " senselessly arrogant " who regard " all the rest of the universe as acting by blind haphazard," he reminded them of " the very rational and emphatical rebuke of Tully—' what can be more sillily arrogant and misbecoming than for a man to think that he has a mind and understanding, but yet in the universe beside there is no such thing? or that those things which, with the utmost stretch of his reason, he can scarce comprehend, should be moved and managed without reason at all?' "‡

In his letters written during this transitional period of his mental development Shelley sought to convince himself of the truth of the existence of God by using similar arguments. He could not understand how anything could exist without a cause. " When do we see effects without cause?" asked the poet significantly, " or what causes are there without corresponding effects?" Applying this theory to the human self Shelley very pointedly enquired, " can we suppose that *our Nature itself* could be without cause—a First Cause—God?"§ This emphatic assertion that from *nothing* nothing can be derived, as well as the representation of God as the cause of our personality, our own self, prove how great was the influence which Locke was even then exercising over the mind of the

* Locke, Essay Concerning the Human Understanding, IX, 3; also X, 2.
† *Ibid*, X, 6.
‡ *Ibid*, X, 6.
§ Shelley, Letter to Hogg (Jan. 3, 1811).

poet. Elsewhere the same idea is more fully developed. "If we allow that the soul is not matter," so argued Shelley, "then, admitting that this actuating principle is such as I have described, admitting it to be finite, there must be something beyond this which influences its actions and all this series advancing, as if it does in one instance, it must do in others, to infinity, it must at last terminate, if it can terminate, in the existence which may be called a Deity "* and it is nothing strange that after delivering himself of this complicated sentence the poet should complain that his head was becoming dizzy.

Nor was the second and less important consideration left untouched. This was the common deistic standpoint which sought the source of an ordered universe in a rational principle. Locke simply hinted at this idea without fully developing it; to his mind the argument from the human personality was conclusive. Shelley, however, gave it far greater prominence than the philosopher. "I think," he pompously informed Hogg, "I can prove the existence of a Deity—a First Cause. I will ask the materialist, how came this universe at first?—He will answer 'by chance.' What chance? I will answer in the words of Spinoza, 'An infinite number of atoms had been floating from all eternity in space, till at last one of them fortuitously diverged from its track, dragging with it another, formed the principle of gravitation, and in consequence, the universe. What cause produced this change, this chance?—For where do we know that cause arise without their corresponding effects.....was not then this a cause, was it not a First Cause? Was not this First Cause a Deity?"†

This period of transition in the mental development of the poet was, however, very short-lived. The sceptical philosophy of Hume and the materialism of the French School of thought (which Shelley very often quoted in his notes on *Queen Mab*) stamped out the last flicker of belief in the mind

* Shelley, Letter to Hogg (Jan. 3, 1811).
† *Ibid* (Jan. 12, 1811).

of Shelley. Those very arguments with which he had sought to prop up his tottering faith were, in his *Necessity of Atheism*, refuted with ill-concealed contempt. He now repudiated *revealed* religion owing to his " perfect conviction of its insufficiency to the happiness of man" while his "rejection of the *natural religion* of the deists arose wholly from reason."* He had now no doubts whatsoever about the question of the existence of God and ridiculed his erstwhile teacher Locke for affirming " in a chapter of whose reasoning I leave your reason to judge, that there is a God."†

Locke recognised an intimate relationship between theology and ethics. Although nature may instil into the minds of men a desire for happiness and an aversion to misery and these innate principles may govern all the activities of men yet they are mere impulses and appetites and not knowledge.‡ In fact, moral rules require proofs for their validity§ and the conception of virtue current in human society varies according to different ideals of happiness.‖ The true sanction of morality is, however, theological. Duties cannot be properly understood without reference to laws. Laws are unintelligible " without a Law-maker or without reward and punishment." The true ground of morality is, consequently, " the will and law of God." It involves " ideas of God, of obligation, and lastly of rewards and punishments." So long as man has no adequate idea of these, he can never have any certain knowledge of what his duties are; he can, at best, form a vague, inchoate idea of morality. But " let any one see the fault, and the rod by it, and with the transgression, a fire ready to punish it; a pleasure tempting and the hand of the Almighty visibly held up and prepared to take vengeance...and then tell me, whether it be possible for people with such a prospect, such a certain knowledge as this,

* Shelley, Letter to Janetta Philips (May, 1811).
† Shelley, Letter to Elizabeth Hitchener (June 11, 1811).
‡ Locke, Essay Concerning the Human Understanding (I, iii, 3).
§ *Ibid* (I, iii, 4).
‖ *Ibid* (I, iii, 6).

wantonly, and without scruple, to offend against a law which they carry about them in indelible characters and that stares them in the face whilst they are breaking it.''* God is, thus, the basis of all ethical principles; it is He who determines the characteristics of virtue and vice; it is He who assigns to each its appropriate reward or punishment. The ethics of Locke is the ethics of Mediaeval theology. It is solely based on love of reward and fear of punishment; and, as such, it is far inferior to modern ideals and principles. The only criterion of this morality is pleasure and pain. " For God, having, by an inseparable connection, joined virtue and public happiness together, and made the practice thereof necessary to the preservation of society and visibly beneficial to all with whom the virtuous man has to do; it is no wonder that every one should not only allow, but recommend and magnify these rules to others.''† Some reward or punishment must be associated with every law of morality. For it is this " enforcement of good and evil " which alone can determine man's will.‡

Reward and punishment have, however, greater association with a future state than with the present; our actual life of everyday experience is, more often than not, a mere arena for the inter-play of stupendous forces which do not always conform to rules of poetic justice. In course of our existence on earth below we have to witness many events which seem to shake to its very foundations our ideals of moral justice. The moral philosopher has, consequently, to fall back upon a future state where even-handed justice will be meted out to all. The only proof, however, that Locke could adduce in favour of his belief in the immortality of the soul was derived from the scriptures. It was Jesus Christ who " brought life and morality to light through the gospels.''§

It is very interesting to observe the gradual transition from orthodoxy to utilitarian ethics in the mind of Shelley.

* Locke, Essay Concerning the Human Understanding, I, iii, 12.
† *Ibid* (I, iii, 12).
‡ *Ibid* (II, xxviii, 4-5).
§ Locke, Letter to the Bishop of Worcester.

Previous to his study of rationalistic and deistic literature the poet's conception of morality and of reward and punishment was determined, more or less, by the atmosphere of thought in the midst of which he had so long been living. Even the hardened criminal in his early romances shrank at the prospect of being punished for crimes he had himself prepetrated in the past. Matilda for instance recoiled from even a cursory contemplation of death and her mind was overwhelmed with fears of what lay in store for her in a future state.* She was convinced that unless she repented, she might have to suffer fierce and horrible torments for eternity.† Wolfstein similarly reflected with consternation on the time when "damnation would yawn beneath his feet and he would shrink from eternal punishment before the tribunal of that God whom he had insulted."‡ In life on earth the vicious man may, indeed, triumph but in the future life everything will be changed. "Yet superior as the fool here supposes himself to be to the creature whom he injures, superior as he boasts himself he may howl with the fiends of darkness in never ending misery,"§ whilst the injured person "receives at the throne of God the rewards of his 'unsuspecting excellence.'"§ God is, in fact, represented as the arbiter and judge of man's destiny; He metes out rewards and punishments according to the deserts of each individual man. The Future State is, similarly, a condition of life in which the virtuous prosper and the vicious suffer eternal torments. It is not possible at this distant date to determine, with any degree of assurance, whether the poet derived these ideas from Locke or imbibed them from the orthodox traditions of his own family. But there is an unmistakable resemblance between his standpoint and that of Locke. Moreover the enthusiasm of Shelley for Locke, specially during his residence at Oxford, is a well-known fact.

* Shelley, Zastrozzi, Chapter XVI.
† *Ibid*, Chapter XVII.
‡ Shelley, St. Irvyne, Chapter III.
§ *Ibid*, Chapter IX.

In course of time, however, Shelley's ' willing suspension of disbelief ' in traditional views was considerably shaken by newer developments of contemporary thought. The influence of Hume was overshadowing everything else. In the poet's *Speculations on Morals* there is a distinct tendency towards a complete rejection of orthodox opinions. In the first chapter of the treatise, ' On the Nature of Virtue ' Shelley gave a very faithful, almost literal, interpretation of the ethical theories of Locke, only to reject them as false. " It has often been held," Shelley pointed out, " that no person is bound to be just or kind, if, on his neglect, he should fail to incur some penalty. Duty is obligation. There can be no obligation without an obliger.—Virtue is a law, to which, it is the will of the law-giver that we should conform; which will, we should, in no manner, be bound to obey, unless some dreadful punishment were attached to disobedience." Shelley applied the methods of analysis and introspection which Locke had done so much to establish to a criticism of the philosopher's own principles. A man comes back " self-satisfied " from the performance of a virtuous act. He has willingly conferred " extensive benefits " upon his fellow-men. Does he, in his behaviour, give us any the slightest hint from which we can infer that " the anticipation of hellish agonies or the hope of heavenly reward had constrained him to the act?" Is it not, on the contrary, plainly discernible from his manner that no such idea has impelled him to the benevolent action?*

Nor could the poet accept Locke's theory that we must annex to the moral laws some good or evil, some reward or punishment, which is not the natural product and consequence of the action itself. The morality and immorality of our action, according to Shelley, does not, in the least, depend on such an arbitrary addition of good and evil. " Nothing is more evident than that the epithet virtue is inapplicable to the refraining from that action on account of the evil arbitrarily attached to it." Even if the act itself is beneficial, so

* Shelley, Speculations on Morals, Chapter II.

Shelley affirmed, " virtue would rather consist in not refraining from it, but in firmly defying the personal consequences attached to its performance." * In fact, the very suspicion of self-interest takes away from the merits of such an action however virtuous it may, at first sight, appear to be. It "has a tendency to pollute the purity of virtue as it consists in the motive rather than in the consequences of an action." The poet was thus more discerning than the philosopher in his analysis of the human mind on which he sought to base his moral theories. Locke, in spite of his acute intellect, had lost sight of the fact that moral judgment deals primarily not with the outward result of any action but with the intention of the actor; and it is quite in the fitness of things that Shelley, one of his disciples in the school of introspective analysis, should point out this defect and thus challenge the correctness of his theory itself. The disciple, however, went still further. He did not scruple to call Locke's moral philosophy " the philosophy of slaves and superstition." It was based on a " common sophism, which like many others, depends on the abuse of metaphorical expressions to a literal purpose, and has produced much of the confusion which has involved the theory of morals."

Equally emphatic was Shelley in his criticism of the view that laws are nothing but the will of the law-giver. Such arbitrary standards should, in his opinion, be repudiated as false and injurious. In order to bring out the absurdity of such a theory as developed by Locke in his Essay, the poet placed before his readers a hypothetical case which conformed to the main ideas of the ethical doctrines of Locke with a slight variation regarding the nature of God. " A usurper of supernatural energy " conquers the world. He possesses " new and unheard of resources for inducing his punishments with all the most terrible attributes of pain," so that any one who transgresses his arbitrary behests might suffer from torments " intense in their degree and protracted to an infinite duration." Does this very fact of omnipotence or of

* Shelley, Speculations on Morals, Chapter II.

eternal punishment make " the will of such a law-giver " a criterion of right or wrong? " The will of the law-giver " on which Locke placed so great an emphasis is not, consequently, an absolute standard of morality. On the contrary, those who have the courage to refuse, like Shelley's Prometheus, to " become the instruments " of such an arbitrary Being will have every claim to be respected as honourable and virtuous men.*

Unlike Locke again, Shelley would keep the question of rewards and punishments entirely separate from the problem of the immortality of the soul or of the existence of a Future State. In his criticism of current opinions regarding the truth or otherwise of the immortality of the soul, Shelley's attitude was that of an enquirer, pure and simple. He was fully aware of the fact that " If it be proved that the world is ruled by a Divine power, no inference necessarily can be drawn, from that circumstance, in favour of a Future State."

Not only so, the poet was also careful enough to recognise the truth of the further corollary that " even if a future state be clearly proved it does not necessarily follow that it will be a state of reward or punishment."† The sceptical outlook of Shelley compelled him to analyse the orthodox ideas of morality. As a result of his analysis he proceeded to divest the problem of all irrelevant accretions and based it on more rational principles.

The age in which Locke developed his philosophical system was an age of transition. Rationalism had not, as yet, fully established itself. It had simply cleared away some of the grosser superstitions and broken down the barriers of dogmatism. The fundamental principles, specially of theology, were seldom disturbed. The philosophers and thinkers of that period sought to develop a rational system of thought indeed but their entire outlook was restricted within the province defined by the central beliefs of the Protestant faith.

* Shelley, Speculations on Morals, Chapter II.
† Shelley, On a Future State.

They could not understand, far less appreciate, any new theory fundamentally opposed to the Christianity they professed. Not that there was no contradiction between the modern world of scientific thought and the older conceptions of theology. On the contrary, the discoveries of science were already rousing honest doubts in the minds of men about the facts of Biblical history which they had, so long, regarded as revelations. In fact, " the contrast had become too unmistakable to be easily masked ;" yet it was sincerely felt, specially by men who recognised " the immense importance to mankind of religious beliefs," that a synthesis between these two inconsistent orders of ideas might be arrived at by a wider interpretation of the principles of orthodox faith. The substance of the two creeds might then be regarded as identical and thus a " reasonable " type of Christianity might be formulated. Locke belonged to this half-rationalistic and half-theological group of thinkers. He was one of those who recognised the absolute necessity of moral laws for the preservation of society ; and also the prominent part played by religious belief in the enforcement of these laws. The very term atheism, or even scepticism, he could not tolerate. " Those are not to be tolerated," he emphatically asserted, " who deny the being of God. Promises, covenants, and oaths *which are the bounds of human society can have no hold on an atheist.* The taking away of God, though but even in thought, dissolves all." * Such a thinker can never undermine by his speculations the foundations of faith which is the cement of society. On the contrary, he will strive to strengthen the influence of religion on the minds of men. He will sweep away the " rubbish " of theologians in order that the true superstructure of religion might be apparent to all.

This is exactly what Locke sought to do in his *Reasonableness of Christianity*. He attempted to bring back Christianity to the norm of the scriptures and elucidate its fundamental principles. He extolled Christianity for its

* Locke, Essay on Toleration.

salutary influence on morals. " It is at least a surer and shorter way to the apprehension of the vulgar mass of mankind, that one manifestly come from God and coming with visible authority from Him should, as a king and law-maker, tell them their duties and require their obedience than leave it to the long and sometimes intricate deductions of reason to be made out to them." The system of Christian theology which Locke developed was, at best, a compromise between traditionary ideas and rational principles. It " did not recognise the hereditary taint of original sin and was silent about the atonement but it recognised the infallibility of the scriptures and accepted the miracles as real." The deistic controversy which marked the middle and the latter part of the eighteenth century gradually exposed the absurdity of such compromises. The light of reason which was brought to bear upon the controversies of the day produced in the minds of all honest doubts regarding the supernatural virtues claimed for the Christian faith, and the infallible nature of scriptural authority was seriously challenged. The speculations of Hume, of Voltaire and the Encyclopaedists, further undermined the orthodox position. It was no longer possible for any man, far less for one of Shelley's revolutionary temperament, to appreciate or even understand the Lockian spirit of compromise. He was now a thorough-going rationalist; he had the courage to carry his arguments to their logical conclusion and could accept no principle which did not stand the most rigid tests of analysis and criticism.

Shelley himself confessed in his letters that he had been an " enthusiastic deist " before he became a confirmed atheist. During his stay at Oxford he had read the works of a large number of philosophers, English and French, and the nature of several arguments used by him in his *Refutation of Deism* confirms the view that he was not unacquainted with the deistic standpoint. To a man so nurtured, the absurdity of Locke's position would be clear in no time. He could, indeed, understand and accept Locke's theory of knowledge or his conception of simple and complex ideas; what he could neither understand nor appreciate was Locke's anxiety to prove the

existence of God and the infallibility of the scriptures. "Locke proves this (that there can be no innate ideas) by induction too clear to admit of rational objection." "He affirms," continued the poet, "in a chapter whose reasoning I leave your reason to judge that there is a God ; he affirms also and that in a most unsupported way that the Holy Ghost dictated St. Paul's writings."* "Which are we to prefer?" asked the poet plaintively, "the proof or the affirmation?" Nor could Shelley, after his recent experiences of Christian bigotry, accept the view of Locke that Christianity strengthens virtue. At that particular period of his life Christianity was identified by this exasperated sceptic with all that is hateful and immoral in life. Although in maturer age Shelley made some amends for his ill-conceived and intemperate vituperations against Christianity, his conception of that particular faith and its founder was quite different. He carried the Lockian analysis of Jesus' character to its logical conclusion and in the light of his criticism Jesus stands forth as a saintly personage, without anything miraculous or supernatural about him, uttering his sublime precepts in the most rational manner possible.†

From a study of the poet's writings during the most formative period of his life it is evident that although he was considerably influenced by Locke yet, very early in life, there is discernible a distinct tendency to move away from the compromise of Locke to a more thoroughly rationalistic standpoint—a standpoint which was plainly due to the influence on his mind of later thinkers, specially Hume.

4

Hume and Shelley

The scientific tendency of the eighteenth century considerably influenced the mind of its greatest thinkers. One

* Shelley, Letter to Elizabeth Hitchener (June 11, 1811).
† Shelley, Essay on Christianity.

after another, all those domains of thought which, in earlier ages, had been reserved for theology and regarded as outside the scope of human intellect, gradually came to be subjected to the scrutiny of the positive methods of analysis and experiment. The boundaries of human knowledge were extended in all directions, so much so, that the supernatural and the mysterious lost much of their influence on the human mind. Thus morality which even Locke had founded on the basis of the will of a supernatural lawgiver was gradually transformed into a positive science. Hume was aware of ethical principles concerning which a much stricter and a more scientific enquiry was not only possible but desirable. The process of this enquiry did not, in his opinion, differ, to any appreciable extent, from the methods followed in other departments of human knowledge. Emphasis was laid equally on analysis and observation. We must " discover the circumstances on both sides, which are common to these qualities," " observe that particular in which the estimable qualities agree on the one hand and the blamable on the other, and after such analysis and observation reach the foundation of ethics, and find those universal principles (or laws) from which all censure or approbation is derived." The entire method is inductive in nature rather than deductive and there are indications in Hume's Enquiry itself, which show that the author was conscious of this distinction. He understood full well that " the experimental method " " deducing," as it did, "general maxims from a comparison of particular instances " was essentially different from that " other scientific method where a general abstract principle is first established and is afterwards branched out into a variety of inferences and conclusions." Morality with him was, however, a question of facts and not of abstract ideas like Metaphysics and consequently must be scientifically treated. Attempts had, indeed, been made in the past to develop a system of ethical principles based entirely on abstract reasoning, but such a system, however " subtle or ingenious," it may, at first sight, appear to be, Hume ruthlessly criticised and unceremoniously rejected.

Ethics with Hume is a positive science " based on fact and observation."*

The progress of science was much more marked during the age of Shelley than during the eighteenth century. The principles which Locke stated and Hume sought to elaborate, had, by the time that Shelley came to write or to reason, firmly established themselves in the domain of English thought. It was, therefore, only natural that the poet should accept the ideas and opinions prevalent in his age and proceed to lay special emphasis on experience as the basis of all speculations, metaphysical or ethical. Morals and Metaphysics are but two aspects of the same " great science which regards the nature and operations of the human mind." Metaphysics, according to him, classifies and assigns names to mental concepts while Ethics regards simply the " determination of that arrangement of them which produces the greatest and most solid happiness." In its methods of enquiry there is absolutely no difference between morality and other sciences. Morality is a *positive science*, the province of its investigations being confined to the " voluntary actions " of man as a sentient and social being. It does not rest satisfied with a mere superficial observation of things ; it goes deeper and seeks to analyse them into their elementary principles. It enquires into ulterior motives and springs of action and tries to discover the laws which govern their operations. The entire superstructure is firmly based on facts of human experience and is painfully joined together according to the strictest laws of scientific investigation. Ethics, according to Shelley, must state " in what manner the sensations which constitute the basis of virtue originate in the human mind ; what are the laws which it receives there ; how far the principles of mind allow it to be an attribute of a human being ; and, lastly, what is the probability of persuading mankind to adopt it as a universal and systematic motive of conduct." There are obvious points of resemblance between Shelley's standpoint and that of Hume

* Hume. Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals, Sec. 1, Hume's Enquiries, Ed. by L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd Edition, pp. 174-75.

as expressed in his *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*; and we might have explained them away as due to the intellectual environment of the poet, if we had not known how eagerly Shelley read and re-read these Enquiries as embodied in the authentic editions of Hume's Essays. The letters of this youthful thinker specially during his residence at Oxford are replete with references to the doctrines and arguments of Hume and in several of them we can very clearly trace the influence of this philosopher's " sceptical solutions " of doubts concerning the operations of the Human Understanding.

The scientific nature of ethical speculations once fully established, the most fundamental question which confronts the moral philosopher is that of the basis of moral distinctions. Are they derived from reason or from " an immediate feeling" or again from " a finer internal sense? " There was, indeed, in the days of Hume considerable divergence in the opinions of men on this particular problem. Some sought to derive morality from *a priori* conclusions of the human intellect while others again regarded it to be the province of moral sentiments. Hume from his eminently rationalistic standpoint criticised both these theories. He pointed out that " no man reasons concerning another's beauty but frequently concerning the justice or injustice of his actions,"* and the basis of his morals being utility a very accurate reason or judgment is absolutely necessary " to give the true determination, amidst such intricate doubts "† arising from observation of opposite qualities. Yet Reason can only enlighten, it can never inspire. It can, after a close analysis, instruct us in the pernicious or useful tendency of qualities and actions; it can discover truth and enrich our mind with its conclusions.‡ Morality, however, is of a more practical nature. It seeks not only to discover truth but regulate human conduct as well. It must have a firm " hold on the affections " of men and " set in motion " their

* Hume, Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals, Sec. 1. *Ibid*, p. 171.
† *Ibid*, Appendix I. (*Ibid*, p. 286).
‡ *Ibid*, p. 172.

active powers. It must take possession of the human heart and inspire it with warm feelings of approbation or disapprobation.* It is requisite, therefore, as Hume observed, that a sentiment should influence the mind of man, in order to give a preference to the useful above the pernicious tendencies.† " Reason instructs us in the several tendencies of actions, and humanity makes a distinction in favour of those which are useful and beneficial ;" so that " the ultimate ends of human actions can never, in any case, be accounted for by reason, but recommend themselves entirely to the sentiments and affections of mankind without any dependence on the intellectual faculties."‡

As early as 1810, Shelley had been attracted to Godwinian philosophy. He had read *Political Justice* and had risen, from its perusal, an altogether different man. The arguments of this eminent rationalist had fascinated him and he accepted, without any hesitation whatsoever, the Godwinian ideal of man as an embodiment of intellect. " Perfect virtue is far from attainable," simply because, " reason is tainted by feeling " and he was constrained to lament that the human mind oftentimes exhibits a picture of irreconcilable inconsistencies.§ Man's essential characteristics will be lost if he does not develop his intelligence. Moreover reason is, according to him, the surest guide to virtue ; through it alone can men grasp truth in all its beauty and grandeur. Unlike Hume, Shelley was, at this early stage of his life, fully convinced that an appeal to reason, or, to quote his exact words, " intellectual opposition to counteract the abuses of society."‖ is the only way in which reforms can be brought about. Such appeals can inspire an entire nation and instil into it new aspirations, " warmer zeal " and " nobler hopes." They

* Hume, Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals, Sec. 1. *Ibid*, p. 172.
† *Ibid*, Appendix I. *Ibid*, p. 286.
‡ *Ibid*, Appendix I. *Ibid*, p. 286 and p. 223.
§ Shelley, Letter to Elizabeth Hitchener (June 20, 1811).
‖ Shelley, Address to the Irish People.

can move men strangely and transform them into enthusiastic supporters of the cause of virtue.*

In his *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Hume pointed out a common error into which moral philosophers of the rationalist school are apt to fall. "Our affections," he observed, "are roused by a general prospect of their objects, from certain rules of conduct, and certain measures of preference of one above another; and these decisions, though really the result of our calm passions and propensities, are yet said, by a natural abuse of terms, to be the determinations of *pure* reason and reflection."† Shelley could not, for any considerable period of time, continue to persist in this mistaken view. He had to abandon, very early in life, the Godwinian standpoint. For his analysis of the human mind made him conscious of the composite nature of our moral judgments. Reason is no longer "a cold and insensible arbiter;" it is, on the contrary, "an assemblage of our better feelings, passions considered under a peculiar mode of its operation."‡ This intuition gradually compelled the poet to develop an idea of morality altogether different from Godwin's. We may not find in his *Speculations on Morals* any definite or elaborate exposition of the part played by reason and emotion in forming our moral judgments. But the very way in which he defines virtue as involving not only "the desire to be the author of good" but also "the apprehension of the manner in which it ought to be done"§ shows the unmistakable influence of Hume.. Not only so, he, in his later life, came fully to recognise that mere reason, unless inspired and strengthened by emotions, can never move men; "reasoned principles of moral conduct" are then mere "seeds cast on the high-way of life which the unconscious passenger tramples into dust."‖ We must "love and admire" before they can influence our actions.

* Shelley, Revolt of Islam, IV, xiii, *et seq.*; also VIII, xxiii, *et seq.*

† Hume, Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals, VI, i. *Ibid*, p. 239.

‡ Shelley, Letter to Hogg (Feb. 7, 1813).

§ Shelley, Speculations on Morals.

‖ Shelley, Introduction, Prometheus Unbound.

Some philosophers in Hume's days were of opinion that the basis of our moral judgments is self-love. This theory, Hume asserted, is opposed to experience. He could not accept their contention that every man perceives how impossible it is for him to lead an isolated existence and has, therefore, to become " favourable to all those habits and principles which promote order in society and ensure to him the quiet possession of so inestimable a blessing."* On the contrary, man praises actions which are oftentimes against his own interests or too remote, in place or time, to affect him. " We have found instances, in which private interest was separate from public, in which it was even contrary. And yet we observed the moral sentiment to continue, notwithstanding this disjunction of interest."† Though self-love might not be directly the basis of moral judgments yet, according to Hobbes and his school, it might indirectly determine our approval or disapproval of particular actions. We might transport ourselves, " by the force of imagination, into distant ages and countries, consider the advantage, which we should have reaped from these characters, had we been contemporaries and had any commerce with them."‡ There are, however, cases in which public interest outweighs private; these cannot be explained on the hypothesis enunciated by Hobbes and his associates. Imagination of another's interest, Hume was very careful to point out, cannot, on any account, be regarded as stronger than a present view of that of our own.§ Not only so, can this doctrine of refined selfishness explain our approbation of qualities useful to the possessor? Can we, through our imagination, suddenly convert ourselves into another person and as suddenly return to ourselves? Is it not, rather, more probable that there is, inherent in our own nature, a principle which

* Hume, Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals, Sec. V, i. *Ibid*, p. 215.

† *Ibid*, V, ii. *Ibid*, p. 219.

‡ *Ibid*, V, i. *Ibid*, p. 217.

§ *Ibid*, V, i. *Cf.* " It is not conceivable how a real sentiment or passion can ever arise from a known imaginary interest; specially when our real interest is still kept in view and is often acknowledged to be entirely distinct from the imaginary and even sometimes opposite to it." (*Ibid*, p. 217.)

makes us prefer actions on account of their general utility as opposed to individual interest?''*

There are, however, a thousand marks of an altruistic element in the human personality which, on a closer analysis, reveals itself as the basis of morality.† "It is through sympathy that everything which contributes to the welfare of society recommends itself to our approbation." Benevolence or sympathy may, indeed, vary with distance both in place and time, yet such variations are eliminated by our calm judgments through the intercourse of sentiments with other men. A general and unalterable moral standard is thus formed, and we apply it for judging all actions however remote in time or place they may be.‡ In fact the sentiment of humanity or benevolence and the sentiment of morality are originally the same. "The same endowments of the mind, in every circumstance, are agreeable to the sentiment of morals and to that of humanity; the same temper is susceptible of high degrees of the one sentiment and of the other, and the same alteration in the objects by their nearer approach or by connexions enlivens the one and the other.''§ It is the only sentiment which is both common and comprehensive enough to form the basis of morals. It is so universal as to extend to all mankind and render the actions and conduct of persons the most remote, an object of applause or censure.‖ The whole merit of this sentiment, however, arises, according to Hume, who is a thorough-going utilitarian, from its tendency to promote the interests of our species and bestow happiness on human society.¶

Benevolence, Hume pointed out, builds up happiness like a wall, justice builds it like a vault.** The rules of justice are all more or less necessary for the stability of

* Hume, Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals, VI, i. *Ibid*, p. 234.
† *Ibid*, Appendix II. *Ibid*, p. 300.
‡ *Ibid*, V, ii. *Ibid*, p. 229.
§ *Ibid*, VI, i. *Ibid*, p. 235.
‖ *Ibid*, IX, i. *Ibid*, p. 272, also p. 273.
¶ *Ibid*, IX, i. *Ibid*, pp. 272-73.
** *Ibid*, Appendix III. *Ibid*, p. 305.

society. Men are so peculiarly situated that, although they might have a thousand reasons for being partial to themselves or to their friends, they find that, for the preservation of the social superstructure on which they depend for their very existence, they have to render implicit obedience to laws of equitable conduct. Nature does not bestow on us benefits in an unlimited abundance. On the contrary, " few enjoyments are given us from her open and liberal hand." We feel that we can obtain them in great abundance only by art, labour and industry. Hence the ideas of property gradually acquire supreme importance in all civil society and justice which secures to man the fruits of this labour becomes one of the main foundations of morality.* It is utilised not only for promoting public interest as in the case of benevolence but also for ensuring peace and security among mankind. But in every case of applying the laws of equity, practical considerations must always be the guiding principle. For instance, though man's most obvious thought might be to assign the largest possessions to the most extensive virtue and give every one the power of doing good, proportioned to his inclination; yet " were mankind to execute such a law; so great is the uncertainty of merit, both from its natural obscurity and from the self-conceit of each individual that no determinate rule of conduct would ever result from it and the total dissolution of society must be the immediate consequence."† Similarly the doctrine of an equal distribution of wealth, though plausible at first sight and actually adopted to an imperfect degree by small states like Sparta with marked beneficial results, is really impracticable at the present stage of social progress. Nay, more, it is, as Hume emphatically asserted, pernicious inasmuch as it checks the exercise of such human virtues as art, care and industry. Instead of preventing want and beggary in a few, it renders the entire community poor.‡

* Hume, Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals, III, i. *Ibid*, p. 188.
† *Ibid*, III, ii. *Ibid*, p. 193.
‡ *Ibid*, III, ii. *Ibid*, p. 194.

The rules of justice then existing in society were sought to be defended by Hume from his own common sense point of view. "Who sees not," he asked, "for instance, that whatever is produced or introduced or improved by man's art or industry ought, for ever, to be secured to him in order to give encouragement to such *useful* habits? That property ought also to descend to children and relations for the same *useful* purpose? That it may be alienated by consent in order to beget that commerce and intercourse, which is beneficial to human society?"*

Like Hume, Shelley could not accept the theory that self-love is the basis of morality. The immediate emotions of human nature, he was always careful to point out, are far removed from morality, they "prompt him to inflict pain and to aggregate dominion." Prompted by selfish instincts man becomes relentless in the pursuit of his own prosperity;† yet the highest instincts of his nature recoil against these primitive tendencies. Like the Scottish philosopher, the poet examined the general experience of man and found in history numerous instances where private interests were sacrificed at the altar of duty.‡ Regulus and Scaevola were persons who made "very slight estimate" of their private interest. In fact, virtue or merit depends on the motive of an action rather than on its consequences. Considerations of self-interest, therefore take away much from the merit of an action; they have, as Shelley very truly observed, a tendency to pollute the purity of virtue rather than strengthen it.§ "Selfishness," the poet never failed to reiterate, "is the offspring of ignorance and mistake;" it is the portion of unreflecting infancy, savage solitude, or of those whom toil of evil occupations has blunted and rendered torpid.‖ It can never form the basis of morality. On the contrary, "an action is often virtuous in proportion to the greatness of the

* Hume, Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals, III, ii. *Ibid*, p. 195.
† Shelley, Speculations on Morals, Chapter I, Benevolence.
‡ *Ibid*, Chapter I, Benevolence.
§ *Ibid*, Chapter II.
‖ *Ibid*, Chapter II.

personal calamity which the author willingly draws upon himself by daring to perform it."* Again : " it is because an action produces an overbalance of pleasure and pain to the greatest number of sentient beings and not merely because its consequences are beneficial or injurious to the author of that action, that it is good or evil."† In the ethical speculations of Shelley, Hume's arguments are supplemented by many subsidiary considerations; yet the appeal to experience, and the general idea underlying them clearly point to the influence of the philosopher on the mind of the poet.

Shelley admitted the prominent part played by imagination in the development of a social sense. His explanation, however, differs widely from what is commonly advanced. We are not " transported to distant countries or distant ages" nor do we " calculate the advantages which might have accrued to us if we had been contemporaries." On the contrary, the poet proceeded to give an interesting psychological analysis of the evolution of sympathy. A human child is selfish simply because he has " a very imperfect consciousness " of other beings endowed with similar powers and similar sensibilities. It is then too much absorbed in its efforts for " the extinction of the pains with which it is perpetually assailed," to do anything else. In course of time, however, it becomes aware of other existences; it observes their gestures and accents, and by analogy, imagines, or rather, " discovers that it is surrounded by natures susceptible of sensations similar to its own." Meantime it has experience of pain in its own person and has developed an idea that such sensations are undesirable. When it comes to understand from " gestures significant of pain," that others also suffer, there is gradually awakened in its mind a desire that such painful experiences should cease. This general idea, however, gathers shape without " any other reference to the mind by which existence of pain is perceived than such as is indispensable to its perception." Thus gradually man

* Shelley, Speculations on Morals, Chapter II.
† *Ibid*, Chapter II.

comes to abhor evil in and for itself and it does not matter whether such evil affects his personality immediately or is too remote to influence it.

The passive and unconscious tendencies of original sensations which centred round self-preservation, are now subordinated to the more active powers of sympathy and in this transition from self-love to sympathy, imagination, as has been already pointed out, acts as an effective instrument. It widens the sympathies of man by acquainting him with the feelings of pleasure or pain active in the heart of his fellow-beings. As imagination is strengthened by culture in civilised society, its inhabitants sympathise more acutely with the sufferings and enjoyments of others. In fact " the only distinction between the selfish man and the virtuous man is that the imagination of the former is confined within a narrow limit while that of the latter embraces a conprehensive circumference " thus enabling him to sympathise with an ever-widening circle of fellow-men. This sympathy or disinterested benevolence which results from a cultivated imagination is the ultimate basis of morality. Like Hume, Shelley found in the ordinary experiences of man a thousand indications of its actual working. Patriotism, love, chivalry, —all were cited as examples to prove that " according to the elementary principles of mind, man is capable of desiring and pursuing good for its own sake." Like Hume again, he recognised the fact that benevolence is an elementary emotion of the human heart. It is on these elementary emotions of disinterestedness that morality is ultimately based. " All the theories which have refined and exalted humanity or those which have been desired as alleviations of its mistakes and evils " have, for their foundation, these feelings of sympathy and benevolence.*

The influence of Hume is again very plainly discernible where benevolence and justice are represented as the two constituent parts of virtue, " the only true object of all voluntary actions of a human being." The conception of justice

* Shelley, Speculations on Morals, Chapter I, Benevolence.

in the ethical speculations of the poet is, however, very far removed from Hume's standpoint. Hume was not a revolutionary in his social ideals. He was more or less conservative in instinct and his idea of justice lays emphasis on that aspect of the virtue which makes for the stability of society. Shelley, on the contrary, lived in an entirely different world of ideas. The French Revolution had come and gone and it had released, in its wake, a system of revolutionary thought which challenged the most cherished traditions of men. The older ideals of life, and the existing institutions of society were carefully analysed by the emancipated intellect of man. They had to stand the test, and, if found wanting, were mercilessly denounced. Moreover, this humanitarian tendency, strengthened as it was by the speculations of Rousseau, vividly brought out in all their lurid colours the many inequities still prevalent in society. The necessity of a new orientation of ideals was imperatively felt by all. The enthusiasm of youth could not rest satisfied with what it considered to be obsolete and effete principles. It strove hard to formulate a new gospel of life and such a gospel was discovered in the revolutionary thinkers of France, specially in Godwin, their able commentator. Hume had pointed out how necessary it was for equitable laws to secure to men and their descendants the products of their own art and industry. He had also pleaded for freedom of exchange and sale to facilitate trade.* The development of property and the consequent unequal distribution of wealth had left a very painful impression on the minds of revolutionary thinkers from Rousseau down to Godwin. Shelley, the admiring pupil of Godwin, could not but regard excessive wealth as a libel on its possessor.† Property, he was convinced, is founded on falsehood against which it is the duty of every reformer to wage incessant war.‡ When inherited, wealth exercises a very demoralising influence on its possessor. It is, therefore, only natural that the particular rules of justice

* Hume, Enquiry Concerning the Principle of Morals, III, ii. *Ibid*, p. 195.
† *Cf.* Shelley, Declaration of Rights, Sec. 17.
‡ Shelley, A Philosophical View of Reform.

which Hume enunciated, based as they were on property and its stability, should find no place in Shelley's scheme and that the conception of justice itself should undergo a radical change.

Nor could the poet pay as much attention to practical considerations as the philosopher had done. He was more attracted by the glamour of ideals than by the common light of everyday existence. Accepting with enthusiasm the intellectual standpoint of Godwin, Shelley could never tolerate the stubborn inertia of concrete reality. We, consequently, find him recommending those very principles which Hume had rejected as pernicious and impracticable.* The object of moral action is to secure happiness to the greatest number of individuals. The quantity of happiness produced is not, however, the sole criterion of morality; attention must also be paid to its equitable distribution among men. " It is not enough, if such a coincidence can be conceived as possible, that one person or class of persons should enjoy the highest happiness, whilst another is suffering a disproportionate degree of misery." The poet was fully conscious of the inequitable distribution of wealth in society and in his letters to Elizabeth Hitchener, he referred, time and again, to the sad contrast between riches and poverty in Ireland. In his *Address to the Irish People* also he lamented that the rich should dominate over the poor and exact from them a servile obedience which degrades the soul. His reforming zeal could never rest satisfied until it had expressed itself unequivocally against the existing order of things and in his *Speculations on Morals* he emphatically pointed out that " the happiness produced by the common efforts and preserved by the common care should be distributed according to the just claims of each individual."† Justice, therefore, is not, as it is with Hume, a principle which

* Hume, Enquiry Concerning the Principle of Morals, III, ii. *Ibid*, pp. 193-94. *Cf.* " However specious these ideas of perfect equality may seem they are really, at bottom, *impracticable*, and were they not so, would be extremely *pernicious* to human society."

† Shelley, Speculations on Morals, I, Plan of a Treatise on Morals.

secures the stability of society; on the contrary, it " regulates benevolence in its application to the concrete realities of life." It is indeed an " elementary law of human nature": but instead of retaining the *status quo* in the social system, it seeks to remodel society according to ideals of equity. " Through this principle," Shelley pointed out in his *Speculations on Morals*,* " men are impelled to distribute any means of pleasure which benevolence may suggest the communication to others, in equal proportions among an equal number of member." It is in this sense that he defined justice as " the apprehension of the manner in which good ought to be done."† Shelley's moral ideas were thus plainly formed by the joint influence of Hume and Godwin till, in his mature age, he developed a more idealistic theory which was different, in a considerable degree, from his earlier opinions.‡

In his romances *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne*, Shelley, nurtured on orthodox traditions, revealed a firm faith in the Immortality of the Soul. The picture that he painted of the torments which sinful men endure in their after-life, is in perfect keeping with the atmosphere of ideas of his early age.§ There is, according to him, a definite relationship between morality and a future state. " Where is virtue? Where is perfection?" asked the youthful poet, and he himself answered, " Where I cannot reach," presumably in this earthly existence. Is then there another existence? If not, perfection is unattainable. If, on the other hand, there be such an existence then alone can man have any hope of living there " rendering and rendered happy."‖ Yet the very form of the argument indicated that there was, even at that early age, growing in the mind of Shelley a tendency towards doubt and scepticism regarding orthodox ideas on that

* Chapter I, Justice.

† Shelley, Speculations on Morals, I, Plan of a Treatise on Morals.

‡ Godwin and Shelley, Journal of the Department of Letters, Calcutta University, Vol. XX.

§ *Cf.* Shelley, St. Irvyne, Ch. IX.

‖ Shelley, Letter to Hogg (June 16, 1811).

question. As he came into more intimate contact with the speculations of the philosophers of his age, this scepticism grew stronger. The future state is no longer a matter of certainty but " a matter at least of doubt."* He had now to admit that " natural reason can only give facts of experience that we now are, that there was a time when we were not." It cannot go any further. For some time, however, the poet clung to his early opinions and sought to strengthen his belief by arguments drawn from *a priori* reasoning. " In nature, everything might be liable to continual change yet nothing can be absolutely annihilated. The soul can, consequently, never perish; on the contrary, in a future state, it will begin its life anew, oblivious of its experiences in a previous existence." Such arguments, however, could not entirely satisfy him. He could only " flatter himself that he had kept clear of suppositions." Yet in his heart of hearts, the poet was conscious that he was merely drawing inferences from hypotheses and suppositions. The words " Then do I suppose," " I think I have a right to draw this inference " clearly show a vacillating state of mind.

Tradition, however, dies very hard; ideas impressed upon the youthful mind become so strongly established there that it refuses to give them up unless and until it is compelled to do so. It will first try to support them from all possible standpoints and will, very reluctantly, relinquish them only when it finds that they are absolutely unjustifiable. Such was the case with Shelley so far as this problem of the immortality of the soul is concerned. In a letter written to Elizabeth Hitchener† the poet looked at the question from a different angle of vision. There are no innate ideas and there is no consciousness during deep sleep. What, then, becomes of our soul in these " moments of intellectual suspension?" Is it annihilated? If so, how is it

* Shelley, Letter to Elizabeth Hitchener (June 20, 1811).
† *Ibid*, (June 25, 1811).

again resuscitated? We know that the rule, " from nothing, nothing can come; to nothing, can nothing return " is universally applicable. Admitting its infallibility we can never conceive of the soul as being reduced to nothingness in our dreamless sleep and then again raising itself from nothingness in our waking state. If this be true in one case of intellectual suspension, it must also be true in other cases as well. " You have witnessed," observed Shelley, " one suspension of intellect in dreamless sleep, you witness another in death. From the first, you will know that you cannot infer any diminution of intellectual force. How contrary then to all analogy to infer annihilation from death, which, you cannot prove, suspends for a moment the force of mind." Though in these arguments the poet showed remarkable powers of acute reasoning yet he was conscious that this was reasoning from analogy; and analogy, as all logicians point out, is not demonstration.

With the weakening of his belief in a future state, Shelley sought to prop it up with other arguments as well; but the very way in which he developed his theory shows much of hesitation and scepticism. He was no longer doubtful that what he was advancing in support of his belief were not demonstrative truths but mere hypotheses. " Microscopic vision," he asserted, " reveals to us the existence of millions of animated beings " the activities of which cannot but attract the observing mind of the scientific investigator of truth. Might not this same microscopic vision " if extended, find that nature itself was but a mass of organised animation?" "Perhaps the animative intellect of all this is in a constant rotation of change. Perhaps a future state is no other than a different mode of terrestrial existence to which we have fitted ourselves in this mode."* The sentences that immediately follow this trend of reasoning throw a flood of light on the state of Shelley's mind at that particular period of his life. When the poet anxiously questioned,

* Shelley, Letter to Elizabeth Hitchener (Nov. 24, 1811).

"Is there any probability of this supposition being true?"—when he fondly clung to it as the basis of his belief that congenial souls must meet, because having fitted themselves for nearly the same mode of being they cannot fail to be near each other,* we cannot but have a shrewd suspicion that his arguments in favour of the immortality of the soul were less an expression of his sincere faith in the theory itself than that of a hankering for an eternity of association with "the sister of his soul," "the cheering beam which gilded his wintry day of life."*

Shelley's belief in a future state which had been already weakened by the scientific movement of thought prevalent in his age received a rude shock from his study of Hume. He found it very difficult to retain his faith in traditional ideas regarding the immortality of the soul. Yet his idealistic temperament could not rest satisfied with this attitude of scepticism. His letters belonging to this period of his life show a conflict between his feelings on the one hand and his intellect on the other. His heart would fain believe in the immortality of the human soul but his intellect refused assent. "Every day," wrote Shelley to Elizabeth Hitchener,† "makes me *feel* more keenly that our being is eternal. Every day brings the conviction how futile, how inadequate are all reasonings to demonstrate it." It was very difficult for him to regard our "souls which measure in their circumscribed domain the distance of orbs" as mere "bubbles which arise from the filth of a stagnant pool, merely to be again re-absorbed into the mass of its corruption." He did not *feel* them to be so. He would welcome any proof which might satisfy his intellect and, in his extremity, used the hackneyed argument that such "eternity of man has ever been believed."

The fragment *On a Future State*, written by Shelley about this time, shows interesting points of resemblance with Hume's essay, *Of the Immortality of the Soul*. The scientific

* Shelley, Letter to Elizabeth Hitchener (Nov. 24, 1811).
† *Ibid*, (Dec. 11, 1811).

investigations so characteristic of that age had clearly shown the intimate relationship between the mind and the body and Hume could not ignore their conclusions. He was very careful to point out that there is such a close association between these two aspects of the human personality that the slightest change in the one corresponds to a similar change in the other. " Sleep, a very small effect on the body, is attended with a great confusion in the soul." Again : " The weakness of the body and that of the mind in infancy are exactly proportionate; their common gradual decay in old age." And he seemed to be proceeding only one step further when he suggested their common dissolution in death.* " This idea is further strengthened by the observation that the last symptoms which the mind discovers are disorder, weakness, insensibility, and stupidity." Such symptoms, in his opinion, point, without the least doubt, to total annihilation.

The line of argument which the youthful poet followed in his discussions about the possibility, or otherwise, of the existence of the human soul after death, seems to paraphrase the ideas and often echo the very phrases of Hume. " The natural philosopher," according to Shelley, " observes the mental powers increase and fade with those of the body and ever accommodate themselves to the most transitory changes of our physical nature. *Sleep* suspends many of the faculties of the vital and intellectual principle; drunkenness and disease will either temporarily or permanently derange them. Madness or idiocy may utterly extinguish the most excellent and delicate of those powers." Like Hume again, Shelley laid special stress on the gradual weakening of mental powers with the decay of the body and he triumphantly referred to this fact as a convincing evidence that as the organs of the body are subject to the laws of inanimate matter " sensation, and preception, and apprehension, are at an end with death."†

* Hume, Of the Immortality of the Soul (published in his " Two Essays MDCCLXVII), *vide*, Hume's Essays, Moral, Political and Literary. Ed. by T. H. Green, Vol. I, pp. 69-71; also Vol. II, pp. 399-406.

† Shelley, On a Future State.

In some respects the poet seemed to go further than the philosopher. Hume pointed out that it is not possible to determine on *a priori* grounds alone, whether mind and body are causally connected. He simply suggested that experience alone can show " whether matter by its structure or arrangement, may not be the cause of thought." What Hume regarded as a mere possibility became, with Shelley, a probable theory and the manner in which he expressed himself on this question plainly showed which way his mind was inclined at that particular period of his life. Shelley pointed out that two entirely different theories were probable regarding the origin of thought. " It is probable, that what we call thought is not an actual being but no more than the relation between certain parts of this infinitely varied mass, of which the universe is composed and which ceases to exist as soon as those parts change their position with regard to each other;" or, thought might, on the contrary, be regarded as some peculiar substance which " permeates and is the cause of the animation of living beings." The drift of the entire passage, however, indicates that the poet was more ready to accept the first than the second. He referred to the second as a supposition, pure and simple, which he introduced merely for the sake of argument. As a matter of fact in the fragment itself, more emphasis is laid on the refutation of any theory about the immortality of the soul which might be based upon this hypothesis than on the elucidation of its implications or a defence of its reasonableness.

The contention that thought (or the soul)—for, according to him, " sensation, perception and apprehension " are mere functions of the soul—is something different from matter could not impress Shelley. He closely followed Hume in order to prove that even then, we cannot postulate the existence of a future state. The philosopher Hume had observed that when everything else in this world is in continual flux and change, it is " contrary to analogy, therefore, to imagine that one single form, seeming the frailest of any, and subject to the greatest disorders, is immortal and indissoluble." He had,

also, pointed out that this spiritual substance, though it might exist independently of matter, is liable to the same laws as other substances. "We have reason to conclude from analogy that nature used it after the manner she does the other substance matter." Shelley merely developed the same idea in his arguments on a future state. There might be some difference between mind and matter, yet this difference does not justify us in holding that mind, and consequently, the soul is beyond the province of the laws of nature. "Why should that substance," asked the poet, "be assumed to be something essentially distinct from all others and exempt from subjection to those laws from which no other substance is exempt? It differs indeed from all other substances as electricity, and light, and magnetism, and the constituent parts of air and earth severally differ from all others. Each of these is subject to change and decay and to conversion into other forms. Yet the difference between light and earth is scarcely greater than that which exists between life, or thought, and fire. The difference between the two former was never alleged as an argument for the eternal permanence of either. Why should the difference between the two latter substances be an argument for the prolongation of the existence of one and not the other, when the existence of both has arrived at their apparent termination?"* Both the philosopher and the poet recognised the principle of the uniformity of nature and extended the sphere of the application of natural laws to the human soul itself.

Both of them were conscious of the close association between the immortality and the pre-existence of the soul. Hume, however, did not lay any very special emphasis on the argument from pre-existence. He simply referred to the fact that "what is incorruptible must also be ingenerable." "The soul, therefore, if immortal, existed before our birth." He at once proceeded to develop other aspects of the question with the bare assertion, "and if the former existence no ways concerned us neither will the latter." With Shelley

* Shelley, On a Future State.

this argument was far more important. He was so far attracted by it that a large section of his fragment *On a Future State* is devoted to an elucidation of its inner significance. "If we have not existed before our birth," he concluded, "if at the period when the parts of nature on which thought and life depend, seem to be woven together, they are woven together; if there are no reasons to suppose that we have existed before that period at which our existence apparently commences, then there are no grounds for supposition that we shall continue to exist after our existence has apparently ceased."* This is certainly a far more emphatic acceptance of the doctrine than the casual reference of Hume.

Like Hume again Shelley protested against the tendency so prevalent among theologians, of dealing with objects which lie beyond experience. The scientific temper of the age refused to dabble with the mysterious and the supernatural. By experiment and analysis it sought to extend the limits of knowledge and demonstrative truth. In a similar way the thinkers and philosophers of the age based all their theories on the solid foundation of experience. They could never accept hasty conclusions or hypotheses unsupported by facts. It is only natural that Hume should ask, "By what arguments or analogies can we prove any state of existence which no one ever saw and which no way resembles any that ever was seen? Who will repose such trust in any pretended philosophy, as to admit, upon its testimony, the reality of so marvellous a scene;" and he ironically observed "some new species of logic is requisite for that purpose, and some new faculties of the mind that may enable us to comprehend that logic."† Equally conscious was the poet of the absurdity of such a procedure. "It is very easy, indeed," Shelley observed, "to form any proposition, concerning which we are ignorant, just not so absurd, as not to be contradictory in itself and defy refutation."‡ The human intellect cannot find in it any formal fallacy and as the subject-matter of the proposition

* Shelley, On a Future State. † Hume, Of the Immortality of the Soul.
‡ Shelley, On a Future State.

itself lies beyond the range of experience it is not possible for any one to discover whether it is based on real facts or not. " The possibility of whatever enters into the wildest imagination to conceive is thus triumphantly vindicated." The philosopher who wants to be guided by reason and experience alone should very carefully guard himself against such a contingency. He should ruthlessly reject any assertion which transcends or goes against nature, or exceeds the limits of our experience. From this standpoint also, the belief in a future state cannot be regarded as rational, for " it is," the poet very pertinently pointed out, " not supported by a single argument " and lies beyond the experience of the human understanding.

What, then, is the basis of this faith? Hume and Shelley were equally conscious of the fact that there lies dormant in the human personality a pronounced aversion to death which, according to both the poet and the philosopher, makes man believe in a future state. " This desire to be for ever as we are, the reluctance to a violent and inexperienced change, which is common to all the animated or inanimate combinations of the universe "—this alone, in the opinion of Shelley, can be regarded as the source of all theories concerning the immortality of the soul. Hume however proceeded further. The very horrors of death are, according to him, a proof positive of the mortality of the soul. Nature does nothing unnecessarily. She would never have instilled into our mind an aversion to death, if death itself were an impossibility. On the contrary, this fear has a very great significance for us. For, in this case, nature has, indeed, given us a horror against an unavoidable event in order that thereby we may be incited to action and our endeavours may, consequently, " remove it some distance." This is, indeed, a main point of difference between the poet and the philosopher, a difference which afterwards led the poet to develop his ideas in an altogether different direction.

Shelley continued his analysis into the nature of the human personality. The arguments of Hume which sought to establish an associationist theory of the human mind could

not satisfy him. The human personality was, no longer, a mere stream of associated ideas. On the contrary, after an investigation into the " intricate and winding chambers " of the mind, Shelley discovered that the principles of the so-called associationist theory had reference only to the sensations received from outside and the ideas developed therefrom. They could analyse and systematise experience, they could find out its characteristics. They could not, however, proceed any further. The causes of sensations or the nature of the self or the outside world were a sealed book to philosophers of this school. " The accurate philosophy of the modern academy," according to his newly formed ideas about the human soul, " had amply shown the prodigious depth and extent of our ignorance respecting the causes and nature of sensation." It had also proved that " popular arguments.... derived from what is called the atomic system " are applicable only to the relation that one object bears to another as apprehended by the mind and not to existence itself.* A deeper analysis also proved that " man is a being of high aspirations, looking both before and after, disclaiming alliance with transience and decay ; incapable of imagining to himself annihilation." " There is a spirit within him at enmity with nothingness and dissolution."† In fact, the poet no longer depended on an intellectual analysis of sensations and ideas alone ; he went further and took cognisance of other aspects of the human personality as well. It is also significant that he based his renewed faith in the immortality of the human soul on " this spirit at enmity with transience and decay " and extended the realm of human experience to include the intuitive elements of our knowledge. Now that materialistic arguments appeared to be inadequate, the almost universal opinion of mankind as to the immortality of the soul came to have, at this transition period of his life, a peculiar

* Shelley, On the Punishment of Death. The similarjty of many of its arguments with those of his fragment On Life, the extensive use of Godwinian principles and similar other characteristics lead to the inevitable conclusion that the treatise must have been written later than On a Future State.

† Shelley, On Life.

significance of its own. This newly developed point of view has been very concisely summed up in a passage of his treatise, *On the Punishment of Death*, where the poet accepted the general consensus of opinion in favour of the existence of a future state.

In *On a Future State* Shelley, basing his opinions on the arguments of Hume, had asserted that " the existence of a God and a future state of rewards and punishments, are totally foreign to the subject." He did not, indeed, refer, at any length, to the arguments of Hume but accepted his conclusions without any reservation whatsoever. In fact, he did not analyse the theory at all ; on the contrary, with a supreme gesture of indifference, the poet pointed out the irrelevancy of such considerations. " Should it be proved.....that the mysterious principle which regulates the proceedings of the universe, is neither intelligent nor sensitive, yet it is not an inconsistency to suppose, at the same time, that the animating power survives the body which it has animated, by laws as independent of any supernatural agent as those through which it first became united with it." Nor was the poet sure that the bestowal of rewards or the infliction of punishments can ever be regarded as the *raison d'être* of a future state. In his pamphlet, *On the Punishment of Death*, however, Shelley expressed a different view altogether. He was already inclined to consider seriously the suggestion of the popular system of religion that " the mind after death, will be pleasurably or painfully affected according to its determinations during life." In our earthly life we find that all our external activities have their inevitable consequences. Analogy is the only method of reasoning which we have to follow in dealing with questions which transcend our experience, and analogy tells us that similar consequences should also result to an individual in his future life, from " the discipline and order of his internal thoughts." Even after making due allowance for accidents, diseases, temperaments and numerous other independent agencies which influence our conduct, there are still enough indications to show, in the words of the poet himself, that, " there are some operations in the order of the whole of

nature, tending.....to some definite mighty end to which the agencies of our peculiar nature are subordinate;" and there is no reason to suppose that " in a future state they should become suddenly exempt from that subordination." This argument by which he sought to convince his readers shows the unmistakable influence of the necessitarian doctrines of Godwin.

The poet thus regained his faith in a future state and even in a future state of rewards and punishments. Obviously such a view must have for its corollary the doctrine of the immortality of the individual human soul. In a later age Shelley spoke of the soul as passing into the Over-soul* and losing its own individuality in a vivid experience of intuitive vision ; but in those early days he regarded such theories to be, at best, indifferent. The soul still retains a personality of her own ; and although she may have intuitive visions yet she never loses herself in God. In Shelley's *Queen Mab*, the earliest poem in which he sought to express his opinions on the social, political and metaphysical problems of the day, the soul of Ianthe is represented as distinctly differentiated from her body. There is no longer any suspicion that the soul may possibly be a mere function of matter. On the contrary, it is regarded as capable of passing beyond the world of physical existence into the realm of spiritual ideals and spiritual forces, where the present, the past and the future of humanity stood revealed before its penetrating gaze. It is only natural that such a conception of the human soul should strengthen his belief in after-life indications of which are discernible even in his treatise *On the Punishment of Death*. The souls of some of the chief protagonists of the *Revolt of Islam* are, in accordance with this changed standpoint of the poet himself, represented as living after death and passing into the world of ideas. This is, indeed, an outlook on life entirely different from Hume's. In fact the idealistic temperament of Shelley could not, for any great length of time, remain satisfied with the conclusions of sceptical philosophy.

* Shelley, Adonais.

The Deistic movement of thought in England sought to discover a rational basis of religion. Miracles which had been regarded in orthodox theology as one of the foundations of faith were subjected to the scrutiny of critical Deism. Unable to bear the searching analysis of the human intellect they almost always crumbled into nothingness. The controversy which ranged round the miracles of Christ undermined, to a very great extent, man's belief in supernatural manifestations of Divinity. Hume, in his famous *Essay on Miracles*, seemed in those days to have said the last word on the subject, and his arguments appealed so strongly to the rationalist temper of the age as to have been accepted almost as axioms by youthful enthusiasts like Shelley. The scientific temper of the age and the intellectual outlook of many a sceptical thinker wielded a very great influence on the minds of those young *alumni* of Oxford who daily met at Shelley's place to discuss metaphysical and moral problems. On this particular point, however, the poet did not go over the ground already traversed by the philosopher. Hume's standpoint was accepted by him as self-evident, so much so that he never thought it necessary to recapitulate them. He simply referred to them and summed up the entire position in a series of telling questions. "Whether it is more probable," asked Shelley, "that the laws of nature, hitherto so immutably harmonious should have undergone violation or that a man should have told a lie?"* This question which he, with great self-confidence, placed before his antagonists, must have been suggested to him by Hume's argument that as a miracle is a violation of natural laws there are irrefutable proofs against its existence. "A miracle," to quote Hume's own words, "is a violation of the laws of nature, and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined."† The

* Shelley, Notes on Queen Mab, VII, ll. 135-36.

† Hume, Enquiry Concerning the Human Understanding, Sec. X, Part I. *Cf.* Shelley, Notes on Queen Mab, VII, ll. 135-36.

second question—" Whether it is more probable that we are ignorant of the natural cause of an event or that we know the supernatural alone? "—was in perfect keeping with the scientific temper of the age afterwards fully utilised by the poet in his exposition of the doctrine of Necessity. The next and the most significant question—whether " in old time when the powers of nature were less known than at present, a certain set of men, were themselves deceived or had some hidden motive for deceiving others or whether God begat a son and performed other miracles of an extraordinary type " —is, to all intents and purposes, an echo of the doctrines of Hume in his *Enquiry Concerning the Human Understanding*.* " If the spirit of religion," observed Hume in that essay, " join itself to the love of wonder, there is an end of common sense and human testimony, in these circumstances, loses all pretensions to authority. A religionist may be an enthusiast and *imagine he sees what has no reality*. He may know his narrative to be false, and yet persevere in it, with the best intentions in the world, for the sake of promoting so holy a cause ; or even where this delusion has no place, vanity excited by so strong a temptation, operates on him more powerfully than on the rest of mankind in any other circumstances, and self-interest with equal force." In an altogether similar vein the poet argued that " The records of all nations afford innumerable instances of men deceiving others either from *vanity* or *interest* or themselves being deceived by the limitedness of their views or their ignorance of natural causes."† The arguments that the poet put forward in his *Refutation of Deism* against the existence of miracles are also reminiscent of Hume. "Evidence," the poet was careful to point out, " of a more imposing and irresistible nature is required in proportion to the remoteness of any event from the sphere of our experience. Every case of miracles is a contest of opposite improbabilities, whether it is more contrary to experience that a miracle should be true or that the

* Hume, Enquiry Concerning the Human Understanding, Sec. X, Part I.
† Shelley, Notes on Queen Mab, VII, ll. 135-36.

story on which it is supported should be false." No testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle unless the testimony be of such a kind that its falsehood would be more miraculous than the fact which it endeavours to establish. Again: "But when the fact attested is such a one as has seldom fallen under our observation, here is a contest of two opposite experiences. The very principle of experience which gives us a certain degree of assurance in the testimony of witnesses, gives us also, in this case, another degree of assurance against the fact which they endeavour to establish."

It was only natural for him to conclude, even as Hume had done, that a miracle is no miracle in any case; for until we are acquainted with all natural causes, we have no reason to imagine others.

Theologians of the orthodox school lay special emphasis on the universality of a belief in the existence of God. According to them, there is inherent in human nature a tendency to devotion, a thirst for reliance on supernatural aid. The existence of God or of Gods has never been disputed in any human community however barbarous or uncivilised it may be. Is such a faith absolutely baseless? Or is it not more probable that this universal belief must "be the result of revelation the memory of which has been preserved by tradition?" These are, indeed questions which the sceptic must answer before he can establish his own theory. When confronted with speculations of this type, Hume did not flinch from his task. He proceeded to deal with them from a historical point of view. The age in which the philosopher flourished might be an age of science, yet historical criticism was still in its infancy. There were extant, at that particular period in the history of English thought, very scanty materials on which such investigations might be based. Nor were there any very rigorous methods of enquiry as are supplied, at present, by anthropological researches into the religious beliefs and traditions of savage races. "His speculations.....were suggested almost exclusively by the classical writers or his own observations of existing modes of

thought amongst the ignorant and superstitious. The materials, however, though scanty enough for any minuteness of theory, were sufficient to suggest the main outlines of a scientific view."* It is not the contemplation of nature as a whole, but " the anxious concern for happiness, the dread of future misery, the terror of death, the thirst for revenge and the appetite for food and other necessaries "† which impel man to believe in supernatural beings. In imagination Hume placed himself in the position of savage races and sought to portray how their religious traditions were first formulated. Man is subjected to varied experiences of life, to prosperity and adversity, to happiness and misery. He tries to find out the causes of the events which befall him but fails to discover them. He can only shadow forth mysterious powers and forces whose operations are unknown and inexplicable. " These *unknown causes*, then, become the constant object of his hope and fear; and while the passions are kept in perpetual alarm by an anxious expectation of the events, the imagination is equally employed in forming ideas of these powers, on which he has so entire a dependence."‡ Man, however, cannot transcend his own personality. His ideas must be derived from his own experience; they must be coloured by his own sentiments. Naturally his Gods are invested with " those qualities with which he is familiarly acquainted and of which he is intimately conscious." They possess all the sympathies and antipathies of their creator and are but an exalted " species of human creatures " " retaining all human passions and appetites " and sometimes, even human forms. Man thus creates his God in his own image and after his likeness.

The philosopher was moreover conscious of the myth-making propensities of the early man's nature. In Section V of his *Natural History of Religion* Hume pointed out that vulgar polytheism instead of proceeding rationally has a

* Leslie Stephen, History of English Thought in the XVIII Century, VI, 31.
† Hume, Natural History of Religion, Sec. III.
‡ *Ibid*, Sec. III.

peculiar tendency of defying every " parity of nature " and of conceiving all its conspicuous productions to be themselves so many real divinities. Their admiration for heroes again leads them, more often than not, to invest these Demi-gods with divine attributes and include them in their Pantheon. Thus created and developed by divergent tendencies, the mythology of the different nations of the world in the early stages of their civilisation gradually takes a definite shape and form. Nor is the transition from polytheism to theism based upon reason. " The vulgar," Hume was careful to observe, " in nations, which have embraced the doctrine of theism, still build it upon irrational and superstitious principles." From an examination of their processes of thought it may be very well inferred that, in the past, whenever a particular community proceeded to accept theistic principles, it must have been led to them not by any rational argument but by an unconscious and gradual promotion of some favoured deity worshipped by its members. " They may either suppose, that, in the distribution of territory among the gods, their nation was subjected to the jurisdiction of that particular deity; or reducing heavenly objects to the model of things below, they may represent one God as the prince or supreme magistrate of the rest, who, though of the same nature, rules them with an authority, like that which an earthly sovereign exercises over his subjects and vassals." Fears and distresses make the worshippers of this particular deity invest him with greater powers; epithets of adulation and praise are accumulated upon him and thus, out of a tribal god there ultimately emerges an Omnipotent Creator of the universe.*

An early acquaintance with the speculations of Hume and the materialists of the French school, had dissipated from the mind of youthful Shelley all the shadowy conceptions of an orthodox God which he had imbibed from his environments in his childhood. During his residence at Oxford he was so far converted as to write his famous (or notorious) *Necessity*

* Hume, Natural History of Religion, Sec. V.

of Atheism which brought about such a revolutionary change on the future prospects of his life. But even when some years later, he sought to give in *Queen Mab* a connected account of the gradual development of the idea of God in human society, his descriptions differed materially from Hume's *Natural History of Religion*. Hume regarded the human passions, especially fear, as the mainspring of man's belief in Gods. " The first ideas of religion arose, not from a contemplation of the works of nature, but from a concern with regard to the events of life, and from the incessant hopes and fears which actuate the human mind "—not from " speculative curiosity " but from " the anxious concern of happiness, dread of future misery, the terror of death, the thirst for revenge and the appetite for food and other necesaries."* The poetic appreciation of the beauty and grandeur which man finds in nature plays a very subordinate part in the creation and development of pagan mythology. In this interpretation of the religion of early man Hume showed himself to be a man of sturdy common sense. Throughout his life, the philosopher showed no sympathy for flights of poetic imagination and refused to soar to the higher regions of idealistic thought. Shelley was, however, a man of an entirely different nature. From his early life he was gifted with an essentially poetic temperament. Always sensitive to whatever is beautiful or magnificent in nature or in human life he could not appreciate the plain, matter-of-fact point of view which Hume sought to establish. His conception of the primitive man is quite different from Hume's. He does not cower before an unknown God, nor does he heap exaggerated terms of flattery on idols of his own creation. The primitive man of Shelley, influenced as the poet is by Rousseauistic ideas of the noble savage, is instinct with imagination. With a poet's eye he looks at the world and falls down in worship before its magnificent presence. The stars which shed their soft radiance on the cradle of his birth, the clouds, the mountains and the seas are all Gods before the wondering eyes of

* Hume, Natural History of Religion, Sec. II.

the savage. In the " untutored infancy " of human civilisation and human religion " The sun had homage and the moon worshipper." Shelley might call this attitude of awe and admiration mere " distempered playfulness," it might " taint " nature by giving an entirely untrue representation of the inner spirit of Necessity which pervades her. Yet this very " distempered playfulness " is a far nobler attitude than that of abject terror which characterised Hume's vulgar polytheist. With the progress of culture man, according to Shelley, invests every object of nature with a personality similar to his own self

> "..... every shape,
> Monstrous or vast, or beautifully wild,
> Which from sensation's relics fancy culls;
> The spirits of the air, the shuddering ghost
> The genii of the elements, the powers,
> That give a shape to Nature's varied works "*

have, for the imaginative vision of this religious faith of early times, a significance all their own. From Shelley's standpoint, this belief is corrupt as it does not proceed from the " enlightened intellect " of Godwinian philosophy but from " the blind heart "† of man in the adolescent stage of his civilisation. It is, however, far more poetic than the picture drawn by the Scottish mentor of the poet. There is, in this description, no hint " of any anxious concern for happiness, nor of any dread of future misery " on which Hume sought to base the earliest religious ideals of man. Shelley's barbarian is not a cringing slave. He does not invest " new strains of adulation " to " insinuate himself into the favour of his Gods."

The romantic Barbarian of Shelley's imagination develops, at a very early stage, powers of reasoning and speculative curiosity which Hume does not recognise even in the common man belonging to comparatively civilised times. The

* Shelley, Queen Mab, VI, ll. 80-85.
† *Ibid*, VI, l. 87.

stupendous scene in the midst of which he lives, its " everlasting and unchanging " laws all attract his attention. He seeks to know them and he finds that the complexities of nature and life " mock the knowledge of his pride " and " reproach his ignorance."* Failing in its attempt to unravel the mysteries of the universe, religion now seeks to ascribe all the inexplicable phenomena which confront it to the one First Cause, itself least understood. " Awhile thou stoodst," says the fairy in *Queen Mab*,

> "..... Awhile thou stoodst
> Baffled and gloomy; then thou didst sum up
> The elements of all thou didst know;
> The changing seasons, winter's leafless reign,
> The budding of the Heaven-breathing trees,
> The eternal orbs that beautify the night,
> The sun-rise and the setting of the moon,
> Earthquakes and wars, and poisons and disease,
> And all their causes, to an abstract point
> Converging, thou didst bend and call it God."†

The savage of Hume, trembling in fear and distress and howling propitiatory songs of praise before the altar of his Gods, is thus replaced by an ardent seeker of truth, who, baffled by the mysteries of the universe, seeks to satisfy his speculative curiosity by imagining a creator and making him the all-pervading spirit which underlies the World.

Inspite, however, of this difference in outlook, the poet had to acknowledge the anthropomorphic tendency of the human mind. The Deity that religion creates is " the prototype of human misrule."‡ He admitted that " the word God which originally meant the unknown cause of the known events which men perceived in the universe " became a man " endowed with human qualities and governing the universe as an earthly monarch governs his kingdom. Their addresses to this imaginary Being, indeed, are much in the same

* *Cf.* Shelley. Queen Mab, VI, ll. 90-92.
† *Ibid*, VI, ll. 93-102.
‡ *Ibid*, VI, l. 105.

style as those of subjects to a king. They acknowledge his benevolence, deprecate his anger, supplicate his favour."* The entire passage is full of reminiscences from Hume and contains unmistakable echoes of his ideas and even of his phraseology. But considering all aspects of the question the influence of Hume's *Natural History of Religion* on Shelley's *Queen Mab* is very slight. The poet formulated his independent opinions about the development of religious ideals in the mind of man, and interpreted them in the light of his own imagination.

In his pamphlet on the *Refutation of Deism*, however, Shelley appeared to have accepted the main thesis of Hume. Like the " vulgar polytheist " of the philosopher " the savage " of Shelley is now very prone to attribute his own " passions and propensities " to all objects, animate or inanimate, which help or hinder him in his activities. He calls them gods and demons and offers them prayers and sacrifices by which he seeks to " confirm the benevolence of the one or mitigate the malignity of the other." " When the winds, the waves and the atmosphere act in such a manner as to thwart or forward his designs he attributes to them the same propensities of whose existence within himself he is conscious when he is instigated by benefits to kindness or by injustice to revenge." The entire outlook was now changed, the romantic glamour which had surrounded the savage in *Queen Mab* vanished and the primitive man now became a calculating utilitarian like Hume himself. Supplication and submission, entreaties, offerings and flattery, replaced the simple worship of wonder and awe which Shelley so graphically described in his earlier poem. In fact, the trend of thought, the very atmosphere of ideas in such passages, plainly indicate that the hand was the hand of Shelley but the voice was the voice of Hume.

Hume's conception of the anthropomorphic tendency in human thought had, by this time, been further supported and developed by French philosophers. Shelley no longer based

* Shelley, Notes on Queen Mab, VI, l. 198.

his argument entirely on Hume; on the contrary, he never discussed this aspect of the question without referring to such treatises in French as *Le Bon Sens* or *La Systeme de la Nature*. These ideas were now very emphatically expressed and the way in which they were formulated plainly showed the strength of Shelley's conviction. "There is," asserted the poet, "no attribute of God which is not either borrowed from the passions and powers of the human mind or which is not a negation." Again: "Barbarians and uncivilised nations have uniformly ordered, under various names, a God of which themselves were the model: revengeful, bloodthirsty, grovelling and capricious. The idol of a savage is a demon that delights in carnage." No less convinced was Shelley of the fact that it is only a cultivated mind which can transcend its own personality and regard things from an objective viewpoint. It is only when such an intellect has been developed that man can form, as the basis of his arguments, a juster and truer conception of God. In his *Refutation of Deism*, it was very appropriately pointed out that "it requires indeed a mind considerably tinctured with science and enlarged by cultivation to contemplate itself not as the centre and model of the universe but as one of the infinitely various multitude of beings of which it is actually composed."

It has been noted that, during the earliest stage of the development of ideas in the mind of Shelley, the philosophical principles enunciated by Locke left a profound impression on him and considerably influenced the evolution of his theories. His ideas, especially those which were concerned with the nature and origin of knowledge, were mainly derived from Lockian philosophy. Within a very short time, however, he leaned more and more towards sensationalism pure and simple, ignoring altogether the idealistic elements of Locke and basing his epistemology entirely upon experience derived from the senses alone. It was now only natural that the theological speculations of the poet should be increasingly coloured by the philosophy of Hume; and several of the arguments he put forward in support of his atheistical conclusions

plainly show the influence of the critical, if not agnostic, attitude of the Scottish philosopher. One of the fundamental principles of Hume's philosophy was his interpretation of causation. Unlike his predecessor, Hume could not find in the phenomenal world any evidence which could support the conception of power or even of substance. His powerful intellect stripped the idea of causation bare of every other element save and except uniform sequence and a habitual anticipation of the recurrence of similar effects from similar causes. In his theological argument the philosopher used this theory to confront the anthropomorphism of Deistic philosophy;* and, in the character of Philo, the careless sceptic of his *Dialoques Concerning Natural Religion* he did not scruple to use the Epicurean hypothesis of the eternity of material particles, for involving in a cloud of doubts the Deistic theory of creation. He played with the idea that a finite number of particles " susceptible of infinite transpositions " *might* bring about, in the course of eternal duration, an economy or order which, by its very nature, *might*, "when once established, support itself, for many ages, if not for eternity." Thus " poized " and thus arranged its matter *might* be so " adjusted as to continue in perpetual motion " and at the same time " preserve a constancy " of its forms. The result will, in consequence, " have the appearance of art and contrivance."†

Shelley in his youthful enthusiasm, eagerly accepted these " sceptical " arguments and his *Necessity of Atheism* shows unmistakable traces of their influence. Like Hume he asserted that " the only idea which we can form of causation is derivable from the conjunction of objects and the consequent inference of one from the other," but he introduced this conception without any apparent relevancy to the trend of reasoning used in his treatise. Shelley proceeded in his own way, accepting, modifying and even rejecting Hume

* Works of David Hume, Ed. by T. H. Green and T. H. Grose, Vol. II, p. 395. Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, Part II.

† Hume's Works, Vol. II, p. 427. Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, Part VIII.

according to the requirements of his standpoint. Thus what the philosopher adduced as a mere suggestion with regard to the material particles of which the universe is constituted was, in the *Necessity of Atheism*, elevated to the dignity of a valid argument. The poet solemnly affirmed: "It is urged that man knows that whatever is must either have had a beginning or have existed from eternity; he also knows that whatever is not eternal must have had a cause. When this reasoning is applied to the Universe, it is necessary to prove that it was created; until that is clearly demonstrated, we may reasonably suppose that it has endured from all eternity." Shelley was now fully conscious of the utter futility of proceeding beyond the material world. He was fully convinced that "it is easier to suppose that the universe has existed from eternity than to conceive a Being beyond its limits capable of creating it." "If the mind sinks beneath the one," the poet asked, "is it an alleviation to increase the intolerability of the burthen?" Nor did he fail to remind his readers that "in a case where two propositions are diametrically opposites the mind believes that which is most (*sic*) comprehensible."*

The arguments that Shelley used for the purpose of combating Locke's proof of the existence of God are also, in the main, derived from Hume. Like Hume, the poet pointed out that causation is alone derived from "constant conjunction" and "consequent inference." Like Hume again, he proceeded not deductively but scientifically. Scientific methods of analysis, observation and experiment revealed to him the truth that "we can infer from effects causes exactly adequate to those effects." By such analysis he came to admit a certain "generative power"† but this power the poet regarded as incomprehensible. He was however careful enough to assert that to refer the fact of creation to an

* Shelley, Notes on Queen Mab, VII, 13. (The Necessity of Atheism as reproduced in the Note.)

† Similarly in the Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion Philo had pointed out that the origin of the universe might be "ascribed to generation or vegetation rather than to reason or design." *Cf.* Works of David Hume, Vol. II, p. 420. Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, Part VII.

eternal, omniscient, omnipotent Being does not lift the veil of mystery from the face of things; on the contrary, it only adds to the obscurity already existing.*

The poet's analysis of the conception of God in the *Necessity of Atheism* shows interesting points of resemblance with the sceptical outlook of Hume. In his *Treatise on Human Nautre* and other metaphysical works, Hume never forgot to assert that, although we can know the effects of the powers of nature, we do not and casnot form any idea whatsoever of their essential characteristics. Shelley in a similar way very emphatically observed, " We see a variety of bodies possessing a variety of powers; we *merely know their effects;* we are in a state of ignorance with respect to their essences and causes.....From the phenomena, which are the objects of our senses, we attempt to infer a cause, which we call God, and gratuitously endow it with all negative and contradictory qualities. From this hypothesis we invent this general name to conceal our ignorance of causes and essences."†

In fact, the theological speculations of Shelley in his early age breathed an air of sceptical doubts and cautious procedure strongly reminiscent of Hume. The accurate and life-like portraiture of the character of a sceptical philosopher which we find in Philo of his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* seems to be perfectly applicable to Shelley at this stage of his mental development. He had, by that time, completely imbibed the spirit of scepticism which pervaded the doctrines of Hume. But it is not justifiable to regard these theories and arguments as mere abstracts of Hume's philosophy. Hogg, indeed, described in his Life of Shelley the genesis of the *Necessity of Atheism* in a manner which represented the treatise to be a mere analysis, or a transcript

* Shelley, Necessity of Atheism; also Notes to Queen Mab, VII, 13.

† Shelley, Notes on Queen Mad, VII, 13. *Cf.* " We are ignorant, it is true, of the manner in which bodies operate on each other. Their force or energy is entirely incomprehensible. But are we not equally ignorant of the manner or force by which a mind, or even the supreme mind, operates either in itself or on body?"—Hume, An Enquiry Concerning the Human Understanding, VII.

rather, from the arguments of Hume in his Essays. But a careful study of the essay itself gives an entirely different view of the matter.

In 1814, Shelley published a pamphlet, *A Refutation of Deism*, in which he proposed to show the utter inability of human reason to form any adequate conception of God and his inscrutable ways. The arguments which the poet adduced in favour of his standpoint definitely show traces of the influence of Hume. We find in them the same cautious and hesitating attitude of mind, the same rejection of hasty conclusions and the same keen and minute analysis of the question at issue.

The facile optimism of the Deist is subjected to a concentrated attack before which it seems to crumble up into nothingness. Deistic philosophy may find a thousand and one marks of design and contrivance; it may discover a "wonderful adaptation of substances which act to those which are acted upon and thence infer a designer and contriver"* but Eusebes, the sceptical supporter of Orthdoxy even like Philo of Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* cannot accept these conclusions without examining them carefully. Philo lays special emphasis on experience as the basis of all knowledge. All inference concerning facts is, in every instance, derived by "transferring of experiments to similar cases;" and, consequently, every alteration of circumstances must, in the very nature of things, give rise to doubts and misgivings about the result.† "When two species of objects have been always observed to be conjoined together, I can infer by *custom* the existence of one whenever I see the existence of the other. But how this argument can have place where objects as in the present case, are single, individual, without parallel or specific resemblances may be

* Shelley, A Refutation of Deism.

† Hume, Works, Vol. II, p. 396. Dialogues on Natural Religion, Part II.

difficult to explain."* Eusebes uses the same trend of argument for refuting the Deistic view-point. He points out that we admit design in a machine simply because in course of our own life we have come across " innumerable instances of machines having been contrived by human art." We can, at once, ascribe these effects to human intelligence because we know beforehand that it is capable of producing them. In the case of the world of nature, however, Eusebes observes, even as Philo pointed out, we have no such experience to fall back upon. Any attempt to discover the causes of its existence is consequently " presumptuous and unsatisfactory." Our " entire ignorance of Divine Nature " makes any such inference absolutely unfounded.†

The evidences of design may indeed plausibly imply the existence of an " Author of Nature " but why should, contends Philo, the search of man for the ultimate reality stop there? If reason be so inquisitive about the origin of this material world why should it not be equally inquisitive regarding the creator of the Creator himself? " Have we not the same reason to trace that ideal world into another world or new intelligent principle? But if we stop and go no further, why go so far? Why not stop at the material world?" In fact, if the material world must have an ideal world as its basis there must inevitably be an endless progression from effects to causes. " It was therefore wise in us to limit all our enquiries to the present world without looking any further;" for " no satisfaction can ever be attained by these speculations which so far exceed the narrow bounds of human understanding." This material universe may well be regarded as having within itself the principle of order, a certain inviolable system necessarily producing the effects which we experience in our life.‡

* Hume, Works, Vol. II, p. 398. Dialogues on Natural Religion, Part II.

† Shelley, A Refutation of Deism.

‡ Hume's Works, Vol. II, pp. 408-09. Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, Part IV.

Eusebes seems to have been a close student of the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. Not only has he imbibed the spirit of scepticism which characterises a very important part of its arguments but he can, if occasion arises, adduce them in support of his own opinions. We seem to hear the accents of Philo when Eusebes confronts his deistic adversary with the apparently innocent query. " But if the fitness of the Universe to produce certain effects, be thus conspicuous and evident how much more exquisite fitness to his end must exist in the Author of this Universe?" Like Philo again he proceeds to argue that if we find it very difficult to believe, " from an admirable arrangement," that the Universe has existed from all eternity, how much more clearly must we perceive the necessity of this very Creator's creation whose perfections comprehend an arrangement far more accurate and just.* What was a mere conjecture with Hume, is now in a fair way towards becoming a certainty with Shelley.

One of the corollaries which plays a very prominent part in the theological speculations of Hume, is the principle that " the cause ought to be exactly proportioned to the effect." On this principle Philo the sceptic bases his arguments regarding the infinity, perfection as well as the unity of God.† This universe shows a wonderful combination of varied phenomena. If there were any *a priori* proof establishing the existence of one single Deity possessed of all powers requisite for the creation of these diverse phenomena it would have, indeed, been needless to multiply causes. But in the absence of any such *a priori* evidence, there is absolutely nothing in our world of experience which can convince us decisively that such divergent powers inhere in one Being. The question—"whether all these attributes are united in one subject or dispersed among several independent Beings " remains well-nigh insoluble.‡

* Shelley, A Refutation of Deism.

† Hume's Works, Vol. II, pp. 412-13. Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, Part V.

‡ *Ibid*, Vol. II, p. 414. Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, Part V.

The arguments of Eusebes on this particular aspect of the controversy appear to be a mere paraphrase of the point of view forcefully developed in the Dialogues of Hume. The passage itself is so reminiscent of the ideas of Hume as to deserve reproduction in its entirety. Eusebes observes " we can only infer from effects causes exactly adequate to those effects. An infinite number of effects demand an infinite number of causes, nor is the philosopher justified in supposing a greater connexion or unity in the latter than is perceptible in the former. The same energy cannot be, at once, the cause of the serpent and the sheep, of the blight by which the harvest is destroyed and the sunshine by which it is matured, of the ferocious propensities by which man becomes a victim to himself and of the accurate judgment by which his institutions are improved." The tentative suggestion in Hume is, again, elevated into an almost irrefutable argument in Shelley, and inspired by this trend of thought in Hume's philosophy Eusebes significantly points out that " the spirit of accurate and exact philosophy is outraged by conclusions which contradict each other so glaringly."

It is rather difficult to find out the standpoint of Hume from the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. In the Introductory Epistle, *Pamphilus to Hermippus*, the philosopher pointed out that the dialogue form, though unsuitable for " accurate and regular argument," is, by its very nature, peculiarly adapted for particular subjects. Many doctrines which are too obvious to require any methodical enquiry have, owing to their peculiar significance, to be constantly impressed upon the minds of men. In such cases the dialogue compensates, by the novelty of its method, the commonplace ideas, traditional or otherwise, which underlie the subject and by its vivacity " enforce the precept." Moreover when treating of a " question of philosophy.....which is so obscure and uncertain that human reason can reach no fixed determination with regard to it " the most suitable form which suggests itself to the philosopher is that of the dialogue or conversation. The clash of arguments and theories, the brilliance of witty repartees and the light that such

discussions throw on the mentality of different types of men, all afford intellectual enjoyment of a high order especially when no cherished ideals are at stake. Applying these considerations to natural religion Hume was careful enough to analyse the inner significance of the problem. His analytical intellect soon discovered that the Being of a God has been universally acknowledged and is, at present, too obvious to need any further proof or arguments. It is also a truth which is of infinite importance for human life, being very closely associated, for centuries, with the highest aspirations of man and the deepest foundations of his moral world. But when we come to a discussion of His nature and attributes, we are in a veritable " Serbonian Bog " where " armies whole have sunk." Human reason returns baffled from an attempt to realise the Infinite, and wordy disputes have, in all ages, been the only result of the creature's efforts to conceive and understand the Creator. " But these are topics so interesting that we cannot restrain our restless enquiry with regard to them ; though nothing but doubt, uncertainty and contradiction, has, as yet, been the result of our most accurate researches." But the " sceptical doubts " which Philo raises against the arguments of Clenthes weaken, to a very great extent, the theistic standpoint. The apparently cogent and close reasoning with which this sceptic assails Deism shakes the very foundations of belief and represents the philosopher as leaning very dangerously away from theistic principles. The fundamental principles of Hume's philosophy militated against the orthodox position ; he could never accept the view which, like Locke, seeks to differentiate between the province of faith and that of reason. His Philo is candid enough to admit that " if we distrust human reason we have no other principle to lead us into religion." *

If then, reason itself presents insurmountable difficulties in the way of the acceptance of a theistic theology, if it divests

* Hume's Works, Vol. II, p. 389. Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, Part I.

the concept of God of all moral attributes * and develops very plausible alternative theories regarding the origin of the universe † the attenuated form of Deism which still remains after this destructive analysis cannot but perplex the students of his philosophy as to Hume's personal opinions. Yet there are indications in the dialogues themselves that the arguments of Philo, the sceptic, do not represent the author's standpoint. His insistence on the " weakness and narrow limits of human reason," its " uncertainty and endless contrarieties," can indeed hoodwink Demea, the defender of orthodox faith, but it is very clearly recognised by Cleanthes as veiling underneath its apparent vehemence " raillery and artificial malice." ‡ His attack against Deism is " somewhat between jest and earnest," and leads to conclusions which Demea finds, all too late, to be as much subversive of orthodoxy as the principles of Cleanthes. " I joined in alliance with you," exclaims this ' rigid and inflexible ' supporter of accepted opinions, " in order to prove the incomprehensible nature of the Divine Being, and refute the principles of Cleanthes, who would measure everything by a human rule and standard but I now find you running into all topics of the greatest libertines and infidels ; and betraying the holy cause which you seemingly espoused. Are you secretly, then, a more dangerous enemy than Cleanthes himself? " § The real standpoint of Hume seems to be summed up in the concluding speech of Philo : " If the whole of natural theology, as some people seem to maintain, resolves itself into one simple, though somewhat ambiguous, at least undefined proposition, that the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence : If this proposition be not capable of extension, variation, or more particular explication : If it affords no inference that affects human life or can be the source of any

* Hume, Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, XI.
† *Ibid*, IX.
‡ *Ibid*, I.
§ *Ibid*, XI.

action or forbearance : And if the analogy, imperfect as it is, can be carried no further than to the human intelligence and cannot be transferred, with any appearance of probability to the other qualities of the mind : If this be really the case what can the most inquisitive, contemplative, and religious man do more than give a plain, philosophical assent to the proposition? " He can only desire that Heaven would be pleased to dissipate, at least alleviate, this profound ignorance by affording " some more particular revelation to mankind and making discoveries of the nature, attributes, and operations of the Divine object of our faith." *

In his early youth, Shelley was considerably influenced by the deistic controversy prevalent in his age. In his letters he confessed that he was once a deist.† The arguments he adduced against Miracles both in his *Necessity of Atheism* and his *Refutation of Deism* show unmistakable traces of deistic thought. The rationalistic attack on the Hebraic conception of God which characterised the Deism of the eighteenth century was remarkably present even there. The writings of Hume with its " sceptical solution " of " sceptical doubts " weakened, to a very great extent, his adherence to deism. Moreover more uncompromising antagonists to orthodoxy like Helvetius, D'Holbach and other French philosophers of the Encyclopaedic school were gradually instilling into the mind of the poet ideas and principles converging more and more towards materialism. His admiration of *Le Systeme de La Nature,* and its uncommon powers,‡ his long quotations from that book in his *Notes on Queen Mab,*§ his angry protestations against the popular belief that " disinterestedness is incompatible with the strictest materialism " all show a very marked inclination towards materialism. This tendency of thought was, however, merely strengthened by his study of the philosophers of the Revolutionary School in

* Hume, Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, XIII.
† Shelley, Letter to Janetta Philips (May, 1811).
‡ Shelley, Letter to Godwin (June 3, 1812).
§ Shelley, Notes on Queen Mab, VII, I. 13.

France ; it had originated earlier in the mind of the poet under the influence of Hume. As early as 1811, the youthful poet announced his rejection of natural religion and pointed out that it " arose wholly from reason." * Still earlier, he ridiculed the Deistic standpoint in his letters.† The attenuated form of Deism which Hume advocated in his Dialogues could not satisfy the critical attitude of mind which Shelley had developed in emulation of the philosopher himself. He could not possibly understand why, going so far, Hume should not proceed further still and establish what he had himself suggested in his Dialogues regarding the eternity of matter.

It was only natural that the peculiar situation created by the ambiguous position of Philo in the Dialogues should attract the poet. It seemed to suggest to him a similar line of attack. Could not he also like this nimble-witted controversialist, pose as a defender of the faith which, by his double-edged advocacy, he wanted to undermine? In an age which shamelessly persecuted Mr. Eaton and other supporters of free-thinking for acts now regarded as ordinary occurrences of everyday life, it was indeed a great pleasure to see the engineer hoist with his own petard and illustrate the potency of free thought. Who knows that there was no " raillery or artificial malice " in Shelley when he sat down gravely to prove that " there is no alternative between Atheism and Christianity " or that his vehement manner is not " somewhat between jest and earnest " when he endeavoured to show how much the cause of natural and revealed Religion has suffered from " the mode of defence of theosophical Christians?" Theosophus' searching analysis of Christian theology and traditions certainly requires answers more adequate and satisfactory than popular and cheap denunciations of human reason. Even the attack on the argument from design leads this ardent defender of orthodoxy to enunciate revolutionary principles like the eternity of matter or the doctrines of Necessitarian Philosophy. Far from

* Shelley, Letter to Janetta Philips (May, 1811).
† Shelley, Letter to Hogg (May 8, 1811).

suggesting the orthodox reply to these contentions, the poet-philosopher ends the dialogue in such a manner as to leave the reader in considerable doubts about his own point of view. Towards the end of the Dialogue itself indications are not wanting that his sympathies were leaning towards materialism, pure and simple. The ironical denunciation of the Atheist with which Theosophus answers Eusebes, the latter's eloquent defence of materialism, his anxiety to prove that the laws of motion and the properties of matter " account for every phenomenon or combination of phenomena exhibited in the universe " all plainly show the inner workings of the poet's mind. This materialistic point of view is, as has been pointed out before, definitely opposed to the Deism of Hume however attenuated it might have been by the reasonings of his sceptical mind.

The vision of the world thus created and expressed in a veiled manner in his *Refutation of Deism* is that of a vast complex blending of physical forces which necessarily move and have their being in the universe. It is a mechanical philosophy in which an immaterial creator is a mere superfluous hypothesis. Eusebes points out that although matter is often conceived of as deprived of all qualities, it is not, in reality inert. On the contrary, " it is infinitely active and subtle ; " and he seeks to prove that the properties of organised matter might be regarded as the efficient cause of all the universe. Accepting the necessitarian doctrines of the poet's newly-found preceptor, Godwin * and, under the influence of *Le Systeme de La Nature*, Eusebes asserts that

* There are, indeed, indications, in Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion which point to a necessitarian interpretation of the universe. " Chance has no place, on any hypothesis, sceptical or religious. Everything is surely governed by steady inviolable laws. And were the inmost essences of things laid open to us, we should then discover a scene, of which, at present, we can have no idea. Instead of admiring the order of natural beings, we should clearly see that it was absolutely impossible for them, in the smallest article, ever to admit of any other disposition." There are passages in Shelley's Refutation of Deism which seem to echo the ideas underlying this standpoint of view, and it is a well-known fact that the poet was considerably influenced by the Philosopher. But the stronger influence on his mind, during this period of his life, was, as internal evidence drawn from

" order and disorder are no more than our own perceptions of the relations which subsisted between ourselves and external objects." They are mere " expressions denoting our perceptions of what is injurious or beneficial to our lives or to the beings in whose welfare we are compelled to sympathise." Unlike Philo, he triumphantly concludes the discussion by enumerating the opinions which he has controverted by his sceptical doubts. " I have shown the absurdity of attributing intelligence to the cause of those effects which we perceive in the universe and the fallacy which lurks in the argument from design." He has gone further and proved, or thinks he has proved, that " mind is the effect and not the cause of motion " and that " power is the attribute and not the origin of Being." All these conclusions are, more or less, materialistic. Eusebes indeed uses them as so many warnings against the presumptions of human reason and invites Theosophus to choose between Atheism and Christianity ; " to declare whether he will pursue his principles to the destruction of the bonds of civilised society or wear the easy yoke of a religion which proclaims : Peace upon earth and good will to all men." But in the absence of any adequate defence of the orthodox standpoint especially when it has been so vehemently denounced by Theosophus, the line of argument which Eusebes adopts is at best inconclusive. If reason be impotent to judge the truth or falsity of rival theological principles, is there any other guide for man to follow? Rejecting Deism what are the reasons for which man will embrace Christianity instead of the first system of religious superstition which he might find before him? Eusebes cannot enlighten any one on this vital question and, consequently, his arguments arrive at a negative result which is more subversive of orthodoxy than the Deism of Theosophus.

His letters and his Notes on Queen Mab show, Godwin. His Political Justice undoubtedly formed the basis of the necessitarian doctrines that the poet formulated (*vide* Godwin and Shelley, Journal of the Department of Letters, Calcutta University, Vol. XX).

The greatest influence on Shelley during this period of his life was Godwin. His conception of necessity left a profound impression upon the poet's mind and was responsible for many of the arguments used in his *Refutation of Deism*. " The greatest, equally with the smallest movements of the universe, are " according to the poet " subjected to the rigid necessity of inevitable laws," and it is on this necessitarian principle that Eusebes finally based his opposition to the Deistic theory concerning the origin of the universe. He admits, indeed, that " the nature of these laws is incomprehensible," but, at the same time, considers the hypothesis of a Deity as a needless superfluity full of " inherent contradictions." The system of the universe is, consequently, upheld not by any spiritual Being but by physical powers or forces and Necessity had, as early as 1814, become the " mother of the world," the soul of all the objects in nature from the mighty spheres of heaven to the smallest mote that dances in the " April sun-gleam." It is impersonal and non-human binding the entire universe into one organic whole. The idealist outlook of Shelley could not, however, rest satisfied with materialism nor with necessitarianism. It soon created out of this Principle of Necessity a Spirit of Nature and of Intellectual Beauty which " consecrates with its hue " all the objects of the world and transforms them with its own radiance.*

5

Conclusion

Hume and Locke, as we may well conclude from a detailed study of the letters and the prose pamphlets of Shelley, exerted a very great influence on the poet's mind when it was being gradually developed in his early youth. Locke's rejection of innate ideas and his theory of knowledge seem to

* *Vide* Godwin and Shelley, Journal of the Department of Letters, Calcutta University, Vol. XX, pp. 63-66.

have first made him conscious of the inadequacy of the orthodox point of view. By accepting the fundamental principles of Locke's philosophy as axiomatic truths Shelley was compelled to give up many of the cherished ideals of his early life. Refusing to accept without examination and analysis the established opinions of the age, Shelley had to utilise the introspective method newly formulated by the philosopher in order that he might thereby build up for himself his own system.

The years 1810-12 mark a critical stage in the development of the poet's mind. His study of sceptical thought was slowly undermining the foundations of faith, yet his attachment to the orthodox beliefs of his childhood and early youth made him reluctant to abandon them. There is, consequently, in the speculations of Shelley, during this particular period of his life, a note of doubt and hesitation ; and it is a significant fact that the arguments he used for the purpose of propping up his tottering faith were either derived from or considerably influenced by Locke.

By the time that the poet wrote and published his *Necessity of Atheism* (1811), there is discernible in his opinions, a distinct tendency towards *sensationalism*. In his interpretation of Locke's system of philosophy, the poet, under the influence of the atmosphere of thought in the midst of which he then lived, showed an incapacity very natural in an untrained mind, to appreciate and understand its fundamental principles. The special emphasis he laid on sensations alone as the material of knowledge and the nature of the grounds of belief he enumerated in the same treatise, plainly indicate the growing influence of Hume on his mind. In fact from this time onward the "sceptical doubts" and "sceptical solutions" of Hume began to mould, in an ever-increasing degree, Shelley's thoughts and ideals. The searching analysis to which he subjected many of the arguments of Locke, his definition of causation as a mere "constant conjunction of objects and the consequent inference of one from the other" mark a definite change in his outlook.

Moreover his conflict with orthodoxy embittered the poet's mind to such an extent that he could not patiently consider any opinion which appeared to support popular views on the church and the state. Consequently he attacked Locke's standpoint regarding such questions with a violence unworthy of a disinterested seeker after truth. His characterisation of the peculiar system of morality developed by Locke as the philosophy of slavery and superstition clearly indicates how exasperated the poet was by the assistance which Locke rendered to the cause of established opinion. His contemptuous reference to the attempts of Locke to demonstrate the reasonableness of Christianity and the existence of a supreme Deity governing and ordering the universe clearly mark a distinct change in the poet's attitude towards his erstwhile master. Though Shelley still retained his faith in the introspective method of Locke his speculations on morals were steeped in an atmosphere strongly reminiscent of Hume. Locke's theological interpretation of morality as based on the Will of an Omnipotent Law-giver enforced by rewards and punishments in a future state was now refuted by arguments which have a very suspicious resemblance to the doctrines of that sceptical thinker; and although the poet differed considerably with Hume in his definition of Justice, the peculiar emphasis that he laid on the utilitarian basis of ethics, the significant prominence he gave to Benevolence and the altruistic aspects of the human personality, his very conception of ethics as a science—all show unmistakably the influence of that utilitarian philosopher.* Shelley's rejection of miracles in his *Notes on Queen Mab* (1813) was similarly based on Hume's celebrated essay on that subject while his "sceptical doubts" concerning the immortality of the soul in his fragmentary essay *On a Future State* were considerably indebted to the same authority. Moreover it is a very significant fact that, in this as well as other pamphlets of Shelley, mere suggestions thrown out by the philosopher were often exalted into definite theories which the poet considered to form the basis of his opinion.

* Shelley, Speculations on Morals.

Shelley's *Refutation of Deism* (1814) occupies a significant place in the development of his mind. Not only is the dialogue form strongly indicative of the ascendency of Hume over the mind of the poet but many of the arguments he used in order to bring out the inadequacy and, more often than not, the absurdity, of the Deistic standpoint are mere paraphrases from Hume's *Dialogues on Natural Religion*. The manner in which Shelley changed his description of the growth and development of religious ideas in primitive man shows how firm a hold the philosopher now had on the poet and in fact the entire account is, more or less, a mere synopsis of Hume's *Natural History of Religion*. In spite, however, of such strong proofs of Shelley's admiring discipleship of Hume, the treatise itself marks a growing tendency in the mind of the poet towards materialism pure and simple. Containing as it does a very eloquent account of the universe as a complex blending of stupendous physical forces, as well as an able attempt to prove motion and matter to be the basis of all objects in the universe, the dialogue defeats its own apparent purpose and shows that D'Holbach and other materialists of the revolutionary school of thought in France were already exerting a great influence on the poet's mind.

Idealist that he was, Shelley could not long live in this atmosphere of scepticism far less of positive materialism. The introspective method that he had, very early in life, learnt from Locke now came to his assistance. His innate Idealism triumphed over an intellectual adherence to materialism which did violence to his own nature; and the poet came to recognise in man a spiritual element which transcended things material. He came to realise that he had, all this time, been blinded by the " seductions " of materialism, which, in the light of his inner vision, was entirely powerless to solve the problems of life or give any adequate idea of the reality underlying appearances. In the *Speculations on Metaphysics* written just a year after his *Refutation of Deism** Shelley reverted to his older standpoint. He now

* *Cf.* " *Here I was obliged to leave off, overcome by thrilling horror.*"—This remark closes this fragment, which was written in 1815. I remember well his

admitted the intuitive nature of our knowledge of self and the explanation he gave regarding our knowledge of other minds shows a very close resemblance to the standpoint of Locke. In his essay *On the Punishment of Death*, again the poet utilised arguments similar to those of Locke for the purpose of proving the existence of that very future state which he had sought to disprove earlier in life.

This reversion to Locke was, however, very short-lived. The political and social movements then prevalent soon came to overshadow all other interests. Alluring visions of rousing Irishmen to a proper sense of their own grievances, his eager desire to establish Associations of Philanthropists for furthering the cause of liberty and his anxious expectancy of an approaching Millennium now engrossed the attention of the poet and Godwin replaced Locke and Hume.

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coming to me from writing it, pale and agitated, to seek refuge in conversation from the fearful emotions it exerted. (*Note by Mrs. Shelley on Shelly's "Speculations on Metaphysics."*)

II

BARON D'HOLBACH AND SHELLEY*

Even during his residence at Oxford, Shelley had come into contact with the materialistic school of philosophy then prevalent among the revolutionary thinkers of France. As has been already pointed out by critics of Shelley, his *Necessity of Atheism* shows distinct traces of its influence on his mind; and any close student of the early pamphlets of Shelley cannot but discern how the poet was gradually progressing from the Lockian standpoint not only to Hume's scepticism but from Hume to the materialism of the French School. The greatest protagonist of materialism in France whose treatise, first published in 1770, disturbed the placid contentment of the world of culture was D'Holbach. But Baron D'Holbach did not, at that early age, influence the mind of the poet. As a matter of fact, although Shelley afterwards read with enthusiasm the *Système de La Nature* he never suspected D'Holbach to have been its author. On the contrary, he sometimes assigned it to Helvetius and sometimes to Mirabaud. In 1812, as he informed Godwin, he had just finished reading, " Le Système de La Nature par M. Mirabaud " and considered it to be a work of uncommon powers. In the treatise itself he came in contact with principles and opinions which found a ready response in his heart, absorbed as he then was, in projects of annihilating intolerance and, with intolerance, religion itself; and such was his enthusiastic admiration of the doctrines it upheld that he eagerly wanted to translate the treatise for the regeneration of his benighted countrymen.†

* For an adequate estimate of *Le Système de La Nature*, *vide*—

1. Morley's Summary of D'Holbach's Philosophy in his *Diderot*.
2. Lange, *History of Materialism*.
3. Martin, *French Liberal Thought, in the XVIII Century*, VII, pp. 170-77.

† Shelley, Letter to Hookham (Aug. 18, 1812).

of its own. Nor could he accept the idealistic view of the human personality. Man is nothing but a mere link in the eternal chain of nature. All his activities, mental or otherwise, are nothing but the result, complex though it be, of the elements of which his physical being is composed. But unable to explain naturally all the phenomena so intimately bound up with our existence, we are so far bewildered by " the variety and complication " of our organism and its movement that we invent mind, " an occult *force*," dragged in to explain some unexplained facts of our life. To the defender of the idealistic view this philosopher of materialism puts a few cogent questions which he considers to be unanswerable : " How can we figure to ourselves a form of being, which, though not matter, still acts upon matter, without having points of contact or analogy with it; and, on the other hand, itself receives the impulsions of matter through material organs that warn it of the presence of external objects?" Again, " How can we conceive of the union of the body and soul, and how can this material body enclose, bind, constrain, determine a fugitive form of being. that escapes every sense?" These are indeed difficulties which an idealist must reconcile. To call in an Omnipotent Being for explaining these enigmas is nothing but an abject " confession of ignorance." Mind is, consequently, nothing but a resultant of the mechanical forces of necessity which lie at the very basis of the universe as we see it around us.

As early as 1811 when Shelley wrote his *Necessity of Atheism* he was unmistakably leaning towards materialism. This tendency of thought was, in his case, more or less, a reaction against what he himself considered to be " the absurdities of the popular philosophy of mind and matter, its fatal consequences in morals and its violent dogmatism."* It had, however, an added interest for the poet, associated as it then was, with some of the most distinguished natural philosophers " to whom " to quote the poet's own words

* Shelley, On Life.

again, " we are indebted for the most stupendous discoveries in physical science."* Naturally he had no difficulty in accepting their theory that sensations are the basis of all knowledge. It is on this fundamental principle that the atheist of Oxford built his entire superstructure of arguments in defence of that unpopular creed. He even did not scruple to repudiate his erstwhile teacher Locke and assert with all the emphasis that he could command that—

" The senses are the sources of all knowledge to the mind; consequently their evidence claims the strongest assent.

The decision of the mind, founded upon our own experience, derived from these sources, claims the next degree."

And " the experience of others, which addresses itself to the former one, occupies the lowest degree." This is, to all intents and purposes, nothing but an accurate exposition of the sensationalist school of thought and clearly demonstrates to what great extent the youthful mind of the poet had been influenced by materialism before he came to study one single page of D'Holbach.†

The study of D'Holbach, however, strengthened these tendencies of thought in Shelley and his long philosophical *Notes on Queen Mab* are full, not only of echoes from *Système de La Nature* but of distinct and acknowledged borrowings and quotations as well. It is a very remarkable fact that in support of the two fundamental principles underlying the poem, namely, the doctrine of necessity and the emphatic or rather over-emphatic assertion of anti-theistic ideas, Shelley cited, with a distinct note of self-complacency, not Godwin, his mentor, but D'Holbach.

* Shelley, On a Future State.

† The earliest reference to D'Holbach's *Le Système de La Nature* that we get in Shelley's letters is dated June 3, 1812. In a letter of that date the poet informed Godwin that he had just finished reading " Le Système de La Nature par Mirabaud." He did not even then know the true author of this treatise. He again referred to it in a letter, dated July 29, 1812, when he " suspected it to be by Helvetius." The growing influence of the book on Shelley's mind is discernible still later (Aug. 18, 1812). He was then fully convinced of its beneficial effect on the human mind and sought to translate it for the edification of his contemporaries.

The influence of the *Système de La Nature* on the theological and philosophical outlook of the poet is more markedly evident in his *Refutation of Deism* than anywhere else. The main principles which D'Holbach sought to elaborate are all represented in the speech of Eusebes; and we seem to feel that Shelley is only reproducing the arguments of the French materialist when Eusebes describes the human mind as nothing but the passive recipient of impressions from outside. The same note of materialism we discern in the argument which this ambiguous supporter of orthodoxy adduces to prove that what we call the soul or the mind must be "considered as the effect, rather than the cause of motion." Nor is Eusebes contented with the acceptance of this part of D'Holbach's principles. On the contrary, the entire system of ideas which the *Système de La Nature* elaborated is utilised by this defender of faith with the sole object of demolishing the deistic point of view.

He does not take anything for granted, not even the idea of the creation of the universe. "Until it is clearly proved the universe was created, we may reasonably suppose that it has endured from all eternity;" and to this admiring disciple of D'Holbach fresh from his study of the *Système de La Nature*, it appears to be far easier to regard the universe as having existed from all eternity, than to conceive an Eternal Being capable of creating it. "If the mind," he asks, "sink beneath the weight of one, is it an alleviation to increase the intolerability of the burthen?" The materialistic conception of the universe hinted at as a possible interpretation of the eternal world soon becomes a certainty when Eusebes, his imagination all aflame with such a glorious vision of one vast unity, proceeds to depict it, in glowing terms, as an interplay of physical forces necessarily combined together. The influence of the *Système de La Nature* is plainly manifest in the vivid picture that he draws for the express purpose of refuting the arguments of Deism. "The greatest, equally with the smallest motion of the universe," he points out, "are subject to the rigid necessity of inevitable laws. These laws are unknown causes of the known effects perceivable in the universe,

Their effects are the boundaries of knowledge, their names the expressions of our ignorance." The acceptance of necessitarian doctrines was, indeed, one of the results of Shelley's study of Godwin's *Political Justice*. But it must be remembered in this connection that Godwin himself was indebted to D'Holbach and others for the enunciation and development of his theory, and Shelley's own exposition shows suspicious resemblances to D'Holbach's. Such suspicions are all the more strengthened when in the very next sentence the reader is confronted with ideas which almost echo the French materialist. "To suppose," proceeds Eusebes, "some existence beyond or above them, is to invent a second and superfluous hypothesis to account for what has been already accounted for by the laws of motion and the properties of matter." Again: "The system of the universe is upheld solely by physical powers. The necessity of matter is the ruler of the world." Not only so, Eusebes is now fully convinced that "the known laws of matter and motion, suffice to unravel, even in the present state of moral and physical science, the majority of those difficulties which the hypothesis of a Deity was invented to explain."

The problems which seem to offer an insurmountable difficulty to such a materialistic conception of the world now have little significance for Eusebes. It is ignorance alone which, according to him, prevents us from explaining each and every phenomenon, however complex or minute it might be, by reference to the laws of nature. With the progress of knowledge these difficulties, we are indirectly assured, will gradually vanish and more evidence will be adduced in favour of this type of materialism. The conception of matter which Eusebes develops in the *Refutation of Deism*, reveals very significantly interesting points of resemblance with that of the *Système de La Nature*. This ardent student of D'Holbach could very well appreciate the French philosopher's rejection of abstract matter. "Doubtless no disposition of inert matter," so he asserted in his *Refutation of Deism*, "or matter deprived of qualities, could ever have composed an animal, a tree or even a stone. But matter deprived of quali-

ties is an abstraction, concerning which it is impossible to form an idea. Matter, such as we behold it, is not inert. It is infinitely active and subtle."

The same influence is discernible in the poet's conception of order and disorder. D'Holbach had pointed out that in this necessitarian world of ours there can be no question of order or disorder. As has been already explained such concepts correspond to no objective reality but are entirely dependent on the standpoint of the perceiving subject. Shelley, an ardent student of *Political Justice*, had been attracted towards D'Holbach by Godwin's acknowledgment of his indebtedness to this materialist philosopher. It is only natural that he should accept his principles and reproduce them in the writings of his youth. Like D'Holbach he was, at that early period of his life, of opinion that " order and disorder are merely modifications of our perceptions of the relations which subsist between ourselves and external objects." The very terms are nothing but " mere expressions denoting our perceptions of what is injurious or beneficial to ourselves or to the beings in whose welfare we are compelled to sympathise by the similarity of their conformation to our own."

D'Holbach's thorough-going materialism made it impossible for him to attribute any personality to Nature. Physical laws can have no affinity to human qualities and the philosopher always cautioned earnest seekers after truth against the anthropomorphic tendency of the human mind. His *Nature* is not a vague abstraction capable of being personified. The poetic mind of Shelley, ever eager to create beautiful and concrete images of truth could not, however, rest satisfied with such an absolutely mechanical conception of the underlying forces of nature. Although in his *Notes on Queen Mab* (VI, 198) he had criticised men for endowing the " unknown cause of known events " with human qualities yet in the very same poem he unconsciously created a Spirit of Nature out of the Godwinian principle of Necessity. The latent idealism of his mind gradually rebelled against the convictions of his intellect till it triumphed over them and this

crudely conceived Spirit of Nature soon developed into the sublime creation of Shelley's imagination whose plastic stress sweeps over the commonplace materials of the world, and transforms them into radiant forms of beauty and truth.

Though from 1812 when Shelley first read ' *Le Système de La Nature* ' to 1814 when his *Refutation of Deism* was published D'Holbach exerted a very great influence over the mind of the poet, the question of determining the extent of this influence is rendered very difficult by the fact that Godwin also derived many theories and ideas from the same source. And knowing, as all critics of Shelley do, how Godwin dominated over Shelley during the same period, it is often doubtful as to whether the poet derived a particular idea from *Political Justice* or from *Système de La Nature*. As a matter of fact, many ideas, *e.g.*, *of Necessity*, which it is very natural to regard as being borrowed from D'Holbach, appear, on closer analysis, to have been, by reason of close parallelism of thought and even of phraseology, derived from *Political Justice* rather than from anything else. Closer personal contact between Godwin and Shelley, the poet's increasing absorption in the social and political theories of his preceptor, gradually overshadowed everything else and the very fact that Shelley gave up the project of translating D'Holbach seems to indicate that he had definitely freed himself from the influence of the materialistic philosopher.

In course of time, the innate idealism of Shelley's mind rebelled even against the Necessitarianism of Godwin not to speak of the more pronounced materialism of the French school. The poet's repudiation of these doctrines as expressed in *On Life* and his letters was absolutely unequivocal and definite. His interesting analysis of his lapse into materialism unmistakably show with what contempt he, at a subsequent period, regarded his early preceptors. His poems are all steeped in the atmosphere of idealistic thought. Sometimes his mystic experiences and intuitive visions so enthusiastically celebrated in his *Epipsychidion*, *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* or *Prometheus Unbound* make one wonder whether this was the same Shelley who once regarded mind to be a mere func-

tion of matter. In fact the period during which the poet was expatiating on the glorious vision of an absolutely mechanised universe was one not of development and progress but of retrogression. He was all this time painfully trying to compel his whole personality to proceed along lines entirely injurious to its own growth. The extent of his reaction against the system of materialistic thought plainly indicates how he was, under a misconceived notion, seeking to do violence to his own nature.

In spite, however, of these injurious effects on his own self, materialism and sceptical thought did one service to the poet. They woke him to a sense of the falsehood and absurdity of much of his earlier orthodox opinions. Under the searching analysis which is a fundamental characteristic of the methods used by sceptics and materialists of the days of Shelley, the cruder ideas of the poet on such questions as the immortality of the soul, the existence of a Deity, underwent a remarkable transformation; and the idealism of Shelley in his later days had little in common with his earlier beliefs. The spirit of orthodoxy had to be exorcised from the mind of Shelley before he could soar to the highest regions of idealistic thought. This process might be painful but it was none the less necessary.

III

GODWIN AND SHELLEY

Introduction.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the greatest influence on European thought, its political and social ideals, was the revolutionary movement in France. The principles enunciated by the thinkers of this school, appealing as they did to the noble and disinterested aspects of human nature, left an indelible impression on the minds of men; especially on those impatient idealists who, oppressed by a sense of social injustice and political inequality, were always urged on by an eager desire to hasten the advent of the Human Millennium. They were welcomed with great enthusiasm by a powerful group of English poets and philosophers who found in them a message of hope for suffering humanity. A new world of " Political Justice " was now revealed to their imagination—a world in which the wicked intolerance of modern civilisation would cease from troubling and the mind would be free; and, anxious as they were for the redemption of man, the ideals of life underlying this movement of thought seemed to offer them a nobler and broader basis for the reconstruction of society. They were inspired with a new vision of society and religion and, with an implicit faith in the perfectibility of human nature, sought to translate their dreams into reality. Accepting, as a fact, the supremacy of the human reason, they aspired to reform society by enlightening the minds of common men. " Ignorance is the parent of bigotry, intolerance, persecution and slavery. Inform and instruct mankind and these evils will

be excluded."* Accordingly these zealous followers of revolutionary doctrines and revolutionary ideals proceeded to "inform and instruct mankind" by placing before them glowing descriptions of the ideal state of nature celebrated by Rousseau.† The denunciation of religious intolerance and intellectual tyranny by Voltaire found, in the writings of these poets and philosophers, echoes which reverberated throughout England.‡ Like D'Holbach, they painted to themselves the miseries of royal courts—a light, cruel and vain world, completely cut off from the natural inlets of just sentiment,—the abode of vice and dissoluteness.§

When, therefore, the revolution swept over France in all its fury it appeared to thinkers of this group, to be a just vindication of the natural rights and liberties of man.‖ It was the dawn of the Millennium—a time when not favoured spots alone, but the entire universe appeared to wear the beauty of promise. Inert natures were, now, roused and lively natures rapt away. The meagre, stale and forbidding ways of custom were, all at once, transformed; they were, no longer, dry and uninspiring, but took the attraction of a country in romance.¶ Slumbering freedom was, now, roused from her stupor of centuries; and that giant Frenzy, uprooting empires as by a whirlwind, was bursting the triple chains of Tyranny and Oppression.** Disdaining national partialities, and rejoicing in every triumph of liberty over arbitrary power, enthusiastic advocates of revolutionary principles voted addresses congratulating the French National Assembly on "the revolution in that country and the prospect it gave, to the two first kingdoms of the world, of a common participation in the blessings of civil and religious liberty." †† A whole nation was now "spurning at slavery and demanding

* Dr. Price, Sermon.
† *Cf.* Coleridge, Religious Musings.
‡ Coleridge, Religious Musings; Shelley, Queen Mab.
§ Wordsworth, Prelude, IX; Shelley, Queen Mab.
‖ and ¶ Wordsworth, Prelude, IX.
** Coleridge, Religious Musings.
†† Address to the National Assembly, Society for Commemorating the Revolution in Great Britain.

liberty with an irresistible voice "* and they saw in this upheaval indications of still greater achievements in the future, of " the ardour of liberty catching and spreading, and a general amendment showing itself in human affairs;" so that " the dominion of kings might be changed for the dominion of laws and the dominion of priests give way to the dominion of reason and conscience." †

The splendid outburst of hope and enthusiasm which welcomed the French Revolution and its theories into England was succeeded, within a very short time, by despondency and disillusionment. The excesses and consequent failure of the revolutionary movement, its substitution of the frenzy of the mob for the tyranny of the aristocrats, made its most enthusiastic supporters pause and ponder. Waking from the trance of theory, they found their highest ideals and fondest aspirations plunged into mire by the very persons whom they had regarded as the champions of liberty. France lay at the feet of factions which were as intolerant of freedom as the proudest aristocrat or the most orthodox abbé of the '*Ancien Régime*;' and the nation itself seemed to have burst its manacles only to wear heavier chains, gilded by the name, without the substance, of liberty. So disgusted were they with the course of events in that unfortunate country, that Liberty, Virtue and Reason lost all their charms; and these disillusioned idealists now heard them with " the same indifference and contempt that a cynic who marries a jilt or a termagant listens to the rhapsodies of lovers."

Meanwhile the "Reign of Terror" dominated the thoughts of every class of the community; it destroyed the mental balance no less of Pitt and his colleagues than of the Church-and-King mobs. Priestley, Hardy and other advocates of freedom and progress fell victims to mob violence. Proclamations were issued, the Militia called out, and methods reminiscent of the Star Chamber introduced to punish political suspects. Even respectable men turned spies and informers against their friends from a sense of public duty. Judges lost

* and † Dr. Price, Sermon.

all sense of equity in the administration of justice and juries, in their eagerness for convicting the accused, refused to take the trouble even of hearing the case for the Crown.* The ideals and aspirations of these youthful revolutionary thinkers were thus changed into bitterness and pessimism; their dawn suddenly revealed itself as dull twilight. "The passions roused by the Terror arrested the progress of liberal movements in England. The alarms and glories of the struggles with Napoleon buried them in oblivion."

The age in which Shelley lived was thus marked by a distinct anti-revolutionary tendency. The disillusionment of Wordsworth, Southey, and Coleridge, on the one hand, no less than the bitter diatribes of Burke on the other, created an atmosphere absolutely hostile to all ideals of reform and change. Nor were his environment and early associations more encouraging.† His father was a gruff old Englishman belonging to the conservative school of thought, who grew "fierce as a lion"‡ at everything which went against his conventional ideas on society, religion or politics. His mother and sisters, though they were always deeply affectionate towards him, lived in an altogether different world too far away from the idealistic atmosphere in which the poet himself moved, to feel any sympathy for his thoughts and aspirations. Syon House Academy where he first received his education was the typical school for the sons of English gentlemen, presided over by a Scotch Dominie of "rather liberal views;"§ while Eton, whither Shelley next went, was remarkable more for its orthodoxy than for liberalism.‖ In spite, however, of these anti-revolutionary surroundings, Shelley, from his early youth, became thoroughly saturated with revolutionary thoughts and revolutionary ideals. He would always stand up boldly against organised tyranny of

* Brailsford, Shelley, Godwin and their Circle.

† *Cf.* "The habits of thinking of my father and myself never coincided" (Shelley, Letter to Godwin, Jan. 10, 1812).

‡ Shelley, Letter, April 29, 1811.

§ Hogg, Life of Shelley, I, 22.

‖ Dowden, Life of Shelley.

every type and refuse obedience to its unreasonable demands. At Eton he was the most daring revolter against the higher authorities of the school.* Even at this early age (1810), Godwin's ' Political Justice ' had cast its spell over the mind of the poet. It seemed to afford him a new creed, a new basis for morality, and a new vision of society. With all the earnestness of a zealous convert, Shelley, forthwith, began to propagate its heterodox principles amongst his associates and fellow-students.† He was, consequently, twice expelled and twice called back through the influence of his father.‡

At Oxford, the anti-religious ideas which he had imbibed from the writings of the revolutionary school of thought, gathered a definite shape. God became to him a vague word " which has been, and which will continue to be, the source of numberless errors unless it be erased from the nomenclature of Philosophy."§ As early as 1811, the youthful poet published " The Necessity of Atheism "—a pamphlet which he sent to all prominent people connected with the University, requesting them to communicate to the author any defect in its reasoning or any refutation of its arguments. The whole world of Oxford was astir; friends remonstrated and the authorities threatened the direst punishments, but Shelley remained obdurate, firmly maintaining his inherent right to think and express his thoughts freely. Necessary action had to be taken and the culprit was expelled for " contumacy in refusing to answer questions put to him and for declining to disavow the obnoxious pamphlet." ‖

Sir Timothy was greatly surprised at the behaviour of his son at the University. He could not condone " the criminal opinions and improper acts " of the poet, much less sympathise with them. Out of regard for the duty which he owed to his own reputation and that of his children he could only

* Medwin, Life of Shelley.

† Shelley, Letter to Hogg (Jan. 16, 1811).

‡ Dr. Peck does not believe in the truth of this statement made by Shelley. *Vide* Life and Works of Shelley, Dr. Peck, Vol. I. p. 28.

§ Shelley, Letter to Hogg (Jan. 3, 1811).

‖ Dowden, Life of Shelley.

dissociate himself from his son and " leave him to the punishment and misery that belongs to the wicked pursuit of an opinion so diabolical,"* unless he abandoned his error and abjured his faith. Nor did the poet, in his distress, find any sympathy or assistance from other members of his family. His mother and sisters, though they felt tenderly towards him, could not, for obvious reasons, avow their sentiments. On the contrary, they and his erstwhile fiancée, Harriet Grove, all recoiled from him as an atheist who was, in their opinion, a terrible being, a veritable worshipper of Satan.† Yet, Shelley, isolated though he was from his friends, relations and acquaintances, did not quail before the gloomy prospect of the future. Unflinching in his faith, the young enthusiast, undaunted by the adverse circumstances in the midst of which he found himself, still believed that " Religion and its establishments, no less than Politics and its establishments " were formidable obstacles to virtue; and he still " longed for the day when men may dare to live in accordance with Nature and Reason." ‡ Meantime his studies progressed apace; Voltaire's articles in the ' Dictionnaire Philosophique,'§ Godwin's ' Political Justice,'‖ Helvetius and D'Holbach¶ all served to strengthen his faith in the revolutionary ideals of Society and Religion.

The thinker who now exerted the greatest influence on the mind of Shelley was William Godwin. Posterity has treated Godwin very ungratefully; and his figure now appears to us hazy and blurred by the passage of time. But during the latter part of the eighteenth century, he " blazed forth as

* Sir T. Shelley, Letter to Shelley (April 5, 1811).

† *Cf.* " My mother imagines me to be in the high-road to Pandemonium " (Shelley to Hogg, Jan. 11, 1811). " She, (Harriet Grove) abhors me as a sceptic " (*Ibid*, Jan. 3, 1811). " My sister does not come to town.....She is lost, lost to everything. Intolerance has tainted her—She talks cant and twaddle." (*Ibid*, April 28, 1811).

‡ Shelley, Letter to Eliz. Hitchener (June 25, 1811).

§ Shelley, Letters (April 24, 1811, May 2. 1811).

‖ Shelley, Letter to Godwin (Jan. 10, 1812).

¶ Shelley, Letter (May 17, 1811). " I am about translating an old French work professedly by M. Mirabaud—La Systeme de la Nature. Do you know anything of it?" Shelley, Letter to Hookham (Aug. 18, 1811).

the sun in the firmament of reputation." * He was the High-Priest of the Revolution, the guide and mentor of its votaries. His 'Political Justice' was their scripture from which could be gathered irrefutable arguments in support of their dreams and ideals. It summed up, as it were, the eternal and imperishable truths embodied in the political and intellectual movements of France; it seemed to raise man from the region of passion and sordidness to the purest atmosphere of the Human Intellect. "No work," says Hazlitt, "gave such a blow to the philosophical mind of the country, as the celebrated 'Enquiry Concerning Political Justice.'"† Wordsworth was, for some time at least, his enthusiastic disciple; while Coleridge considered him as one whose holy guidance had soothed his stormy soul in the midst of its distress.‡ Shelley himself had, as early as 1810, read his book which opened to his mind fresh and more extensive views. It materially influenced his character and he "rose from its perusal, a wiser and better man."§ The letters that he wrote to his friends about this time are full of appreciative references to Godwin and his opinions.‖ His whole scheme of life was now based on the principles advocated by his master. His resolution to live according to reason and nature, his hatred of the tyranny inherent in human society,¶ and his belief in the close relationship between politics and morality,** were, to a very great extent, coloured by the writings of Godwin. He looked at the thinkers and philosophers of the French Revolution mainly through the eyes of his master whom he considered to be a great personality always "planning the welfare of mankind."†† He was, therefore, profoundly moved to learn that Godwin was still alive; and immediately hastened to lay bare his soul before the Sage of

* Hazlitt, Spirit of the Age.
† Hazlitt, *Ibid.*
‡ For Wordsworth, *vide* Legouis : Coleridge, Ode to Godwin.
§ Shelley, Letter to Godwin (Jan. 10, 1812).
‖ *Cf.* Shelley, Letters to Hogg (Jan. 16 and May 13, 1811).
¶ Shelley, Letter to Eliz. Hitchener (Dec. 26, 1811).
** *Ibid.* (Jan. 7, 1812).
†† Shelley, Letter to Godwin (Jan. 3, 1812).

Skinner Street in a letter remarkable for its simplicity and truthfulness. The feelings of reverence with which he always regarded Godwin, and his joy at the discovery that he was alive, find a free and frank expression in every line of the letter. "From the earliest period of my knowledge of his principles," wrote Shelley, "I have ardently desired to share, on the footing of intimacy, that intellect which I have delighted to contemplate in its emanations. Considering, then, these feelings, you will not be surprised at the inconceivable emotions with which I have learnt your existence and your dwelling." For "I had felt regret that the glory of your being had passed from the earth of ours and had enrolled your name in the list of the honourable dead."*

Godwin, however, did not feel any such "inconceivable emotions" when he received the eulogy of Shelley. Cold and intellectual by nature and constitution, his answers to the enthusiastic epistles of the poet were characteristic. He felt, indeed, an earnest and deep interest in the welfare of his newly found disciple, but was cautious enough to warn him that being a scholar, he ought not to have an intolerable itch to become a teacher.† The name of Godwin, nevertheless, excited in Shelley feelings of reverence and admiration;‡ for he was a luminary too dazzling for the darkness which surrounded him and his friendship was an acquisition "more valuable than the gifts of princes."§ In the letters which Shelley received from Godwin, he seemed to discern a firm and elevated mind, matured by the experience of ages through which this "veteran of persecution and independence" had to pass during his eventful career; and what struck the poet most, was the fact that in spite of the atmosphere of gloom and despair which surrounded Godwin, he remained unchanged. "I have," the poet enthusiastically informed Miss Hitchener, "no soul-chilling alteration to record of his character, the unmoderated enthusiasm of philanthropy still

* Shelley, Letter to Godwin (Jan. 3, 1812).
† Godwin, Letter to Shelley (quoted in Shelley's letter).
‡ and § Shelley, Letter to Godwin (Jan. 3, 1812).

characterises him. He preserves those principles of extensive and independent action which alone can give energy and vigour. . . . The age of the body has not induced the age of the soul : tho' his shell is mouldering, the spirit within seems, in no wise, to participate in the decay." * So high was the opinion of Shelley regarding the exalted personality of his master that he could not even dream of the time when Godwin would become closely associated with him. He had, in fact, never dared to hope that this great prophet of the revolution, who had gained his love and confidence by his principles and opinions, whose philosophy of life he had accepted with the fullest approbation of his reason, and whose very existence had become sacred to him, should condescend to be, not only his " friend and adviser," but " the personal exciter and strengthener of his virtuous habits " as well. The offer of Godwin's friendship came to him " almost as a ray of second existence."† Even when the poet differed from the philosopher he was Humility personified. " Guide thou," cried he, in the fulness of his heart, " and direct me, for when you reprove me, Reason speaks and I acquiesce in her decisions."‡

It was, therefore, only natural that the political and social ideals which Godwin advocated should profoundly influence the mind of Shelley who came into intimate contact with them during the most formative period of his life. In fact, the principles of Godwinian philosophy left a very deep impression on the mind of his ardent disciple and went a great way towards moulding his views and aspirations. Not only the Fundamental Principles on which Godwin's philosophy was based, but even the Methods which he recommended for the attainment of perfection formed, as it were, the basis on which the earlier theories of the poet were constructed. They were the stuff that Shelley's dreams were made of.

* Shelley, Letter to Elizabeth Hitchener (Jan. 20, 1812). *Cf. Revolt of Islam*, Dedication, St. 13.

† Shelley, Letter to Godwin (Jan. 16, 1812).

‡ Shelley, Letter to Godwin (March 8, 1812).

2

The Fundamental Principles.

Godwin was, by birth and education, a man of independent spirit. At the approach of the French Revolution, he and his associates, Holcroft, Gerrald, and others fell under the spell of its enthusiasm and became ardent supporters of the revolutionary creed. They took a very prominent part in the proceedings of the numerous Associations which were, at that time, growing up in support of these ideals. When the years of repression commenced, Godwin keenly felt its lash; one by one, his friends dropped out, either to serve their terms of imprisonment in the convict settlements of Botany Bay, or to end their lives in misery and exile. His brightest hopes and fondest aspirations seemed to be frustrated for ever; the atrocities of the Terror in France and the cruel wars between that infant Republic and the banded monarchs of Europe, all seemed to shake his belief in the ideals and principles of progress. Pessimism cast a gloom over the whole atmosphere of thought and action. Ardent believers in the movement became disillusioned and recanted their former convictions.

Yet, in the midst of these adverse circumstances, Godwin remained steadfast in his faith. The dreary prospect of the future could not make him flinch an iota from his cherished ideals. He always was, and still remained, an uncompromising foe to all forms of organised coercion. Only, the apparent failure of his dreams made him all the more alert in his investigation of truth, all the more eager to establish his principles on the broadest basis of equity and justice. The anti-revolutionary propaganda could not touch him nor could threats of persecution make any impression on his mind. The people of England might be "assiduously excited to declare their loyalty and mark every man as obnoxious who was not ready to sign the Shibboleth of the Constitution." *

* Godwin, Political Justice, Preface.

Money might be raised by voluntary subscription to persecute the social and political heretics and the authority of the Government might combine with the resentment of individuals to oppress them.* But Godwin was not, in the least, daunted; they were mere "accidents," unforeseen indeed, but unable to produce any alteration in his designs.† For it is the "property of truth to be fearless and to prove victorious over all adversaries" and no great degree of fortitude is required to "look with indifference upon the false fires of the moment and to foresee the calm period of Reason which will succeed."‡ Unmoved, therefore, by the bitterest persecutions of independent thought, the author calmly sat down to answer the challenge of Burke and other anti-revolutionary thinkers. His Political Justice is a fearless exposition of the social and political ideals of the French Revolution, remarkable for its thoroughness and industry. Here he sought to expose the injustice inherent in the very structure of society as it was then constituted and demolish the different types of arguments which were being offered to prop up its tottering strength.

Godwin was profoundly influenced by the French Philosophers of his age. He had derived considerable instruction from them, especially from the works of D'Holbach, Helvetius and Rousseau;§ and it was from them that he derived his theories regarding the fundamental principles of the human mind.‖ The orthodox conception of innate ideas and instincts governing the actions of men and developing their character are summarily rejected as "superfluous, unsatisfactory and absurd;" they are pernicious in as much as they bar the progress of enquiry by interposing mysterious and occult causes, incapable of analysis and investigation. On the contrary, "the actions and dispositions of mankind are the offspring of circumstances and events and not of any

* Godwin, Political Justice, Preface.
† *Ibid.*
‡ *Ibid.*
§ *Ibid.*
‖ *Ibid.* I, iv.

original determinations which they bring into the world." The human mind itself is an intelligent agent, guided by motives and prospects presented to the understanding—not by causes of which we have no proper cognisance and can form no adequate idea.*

In his anxiety to disprove what he regarded as prejudices fettering the independent spirit of man, Godwin went to the other extreme, and became an out-and-out follower of the Associationist School of Philosophy. The mind is nothing else but " a faculty of perception." Our knowledge and ideas are all based upon our experience. We begin our life with a " *tabula rasa* " and coming into contact with the external world receive impressions which are stored up in our memory and combined into associated groups of ideas. Thus we gain our knowledge, our wisdom, in fact, everything that distinguishes us as rational beings.† Not only so, the human understanding and the human will are very intimately connected; and the " great stream of our voluntary actions essentially depends, not upon the direct impulses of sense, but upon the decisions of the understanding."‡ This is the corner-stone of all his speculations, the basis of all his dreams.

Unlike Godwin, there had, always, been in the background of Shelley's mind a tendency towards idealistic thought which was greatly strengthened by his study of Plato during the early days of his youth.§ So long as he was under the influence of this latent idealism, Shelley could not ignore the innate and the instinctive in human nature. He had to admit their existence and their function in the economy of life and the development of personality. He accepted " the line of distinction " that is generally drawn between " the instinctive and the rational motives of action; " the former include " congeniality, sympathy, and unaccountable attractions of

* Godwin, Political Justice, I. iv.
† *Ibid.*, I. v.
‡ *Ibid.*, V. iv.
§ Hogg, Life of Shelley.

the intellect " which are absolutely outside human power to control or direct and reck of no considerations, utilitarian or otherwise. Reason stands powerless before them. We may " plainly foresee how these instinctive motives act independently of all questions of self-interest and even in violent contradiction thereto; our judgment may disapprove, yet, perforce, we cannot take any pains to obviate them." *

In the company of his political and social associates, however, the poet lived in a world of ideas entirely different. He had read Godwin and risen a " wiser man; " and one of the signs of this increased wisdom was, perhaps, his unquestioning acceptance of the Associationist School of Psychology. Locke now governs all his thoughts and ideas regarding the human mind. He " *proves* that there are no innate ideas, that, in consequence, there can be no innate speculative or practical principles." All ideas are, therefore, derived from the senses, " originating from some sensual excitation." This has been, according to Shelley proved by " induction too clear to admit of rational objection."† Again: " the non-existence of innate ideas is proved by Locke; he challenges any one to find out an idea which is innate. This is conclusive."‡ Equally conclusive was the victory over Shelley's mind. It was not for nothing that he had placed himself under the guidance of that Great Oracle. His self-surrender was complete; he now adopted the shibboleths of Godwinian Philosophy and propagated its principles with the zeal and earnestness of a new convert.

There are no innate ideas in the human mind—nay more, thought itself is a bye-product of material elements. Like the materialistic school of philosophers—those to whom, according to Shelley, we are " indebted for the most stupendous discoveries in the physical science "—the poet was absolutely convinced that " intelligence is the mere result of

* Shelley, Letter to Hogg (Jan. 23, 1811).
† *Cf.* Shelley, Letters to Eliz. Hitchener (June, 11, 1811, August, 19, 1811).
‡ Shelley, Letter to Eliz. Hitchener (July 19, 1811).

certain combinations among the particles of its object." * The mind has no independent existence of its own; its powers "increase and fade with those of the body and even accommodate themselves to the transitory changes of our physical nature." Sleep suspends many of our mental faculties; madness and idiocy destroy the most excellent and delicate of them, while drunkenness and disease derange them either permanently or temporarily. Old age withers our intellect and youth strengthens it. Is it not, therefore, probable that "our intellectual operations are entirely dependent on the organs of sense," and "what we call thought is not an actual being but no more than the relation between certain parts of that infinitely varied mass, of which the rest of the universe is composed?" † Far from being dissatisfied with this materialistic conception of mind, Shelley considered it to be a theory, at once synthetic and comprehensive, perfectly adequate to explain all mental phenomena not excluding even the subtlest analysis of its modifications and parts.

Yet, he could not wholly ignore the intuitive elements of our mind. Though convinced of its entire dependence on matter, Shelley was constrained to admit that perception alone cannot explain self-consciousness. The existence of other minds may be known to us through perception and inference based upon "a periodical recurrence of masses of ideas which our voluntary determinations have no power to circumscribe or arrest;" but the consciousness of our own existence cannot be so accounted for. We are immediately aware of our own existence, our own personality, and our own activities; our knowledge, in this particular aspect, is intuitive and not inferential.‡

Nor could the poet ever forget his own personal experiences of intuitive truths. In his childhood while he was still a student, he had been profoundly influenced by a sudden revelation of what was to be the future goal of his life as a

* Shelley, On a Future State.

† *Ibid.*

‡ Shelley, Speculations on Metaphysics. The Mind. *Vide* Locke, Hume and Shelley.

thinker and a man. He had, always, been haunted by thoughts of great deeds and well did he remember the hour which, to quote his own words,

" Burst
My spirit's sleep; a fresh May-dawn it was,
When I walked forth in the glittering grass,
And wept I knew not why: until there rose
From the near school-room, voices, that, alas!
Were but an echo from the world of woes "*—

and instinctively there arose in his mind a solemn resolution—

" I will be wise,
And just, and free, and mild, if in me lies
Such power, for I grow weary to behold
The selfish and the strong still tyrannise
Without reproach or check."†

He now worshipped at the shrine of Intellectual Beauty—a Spirit who recks of no intellectual activities of his mind, but inspires him at moments of deep intuitional insight. It moves with an inconstant wing among men and visits

" with inconstant glance
Each human heart and countenance."‡

And as the poet passed onward musing deeply on the lot of life, its shadow fell suddenly upon the mystic thinker, and he " shrieked and clasped his hands in ecstasy."

Such experiences were sure to strengthen Shelley's belief in intuition and the doctrine of innate ideas. During the latter part of his life, his veneration for Greek Philosophy, especially Plato, brought about a significant change in his opinions. The materialistic interpretation of mental activities

* Revolt of Islam, Dedication, St. III.
† *Ibid.*, St. IV.
‡ Hymn to Intellectual Beauty.

which the poet had imbibed from his associates of the revolutionary school and which had, so long, been colouring his speculations on morals and philosophy, could no longer satisfy him. The mind is no longer a *tabula rasa* for external impressions; far less an effect of material forces. "Each individual, on the contrary, has a peculiar frame of mind which, whilst the features of the great mass of his actions remain uniform, impresses the minuter elements with its peculiar hues." * The external aspects of our conduct may be entirely governed by the "general representation of the past feelings of mankind,.....as it exists in government, religion and domestic habits," but internally all is conducted otherwise. The efficiency, the essence, the vitality of actions derives its colour from what is, in no way, contributed to, from any external source.† A man is, in this respect, like a plant—he may be "cankered, or distorted, or inflated" by his environments, even as a plant is, by the soil in which it springs; but he will, none the less, retain those qualities which essentially divide him from all others. Not only so, in the abysmal depths of his personality the poet often seems to hear "echoes from the ante-natal world," echoes which transform his entire existence by their inspiration.‡ Love or Asia, must be guided by the intuitive urgings of the spirit within, before she can bring about the redemption of man. She must follow the receding voice of echoes, of instinctive promptings of the human mind to the very depths of knowledge and existence before she succeeds in liberating Humanity from the tyranny of existing society. It is not by the exercise of reason alone, nor by the mere analysis of experience that man will be perfected, but by descending into the depths of reality—

> "Through the veil and the bar,
> Of things which seem and are
> Even to the steps of the remotest throne,"

* Shelley, Speculations on Morals, II.
† *Ibid.*
‡ Epypsychidion.

where the appearances of the world cannot deceive nor their diversity obscure the spirit within, but—

" There is One pervading, One alone." *

It is this direct and intuitive experience of the spirit within, which reveals the inner significance of the universe and overthrows the age-long despotism of customs and traditions.

In fact, such was the idealistic trend of Shelley's mind that, though under the influence of the revolutionary school of philosophy he had, in his early youth, developed materialistic tendencies of thought, even the all-powerful intellect of Godwin could not captivate him for any great length of time. After a short period of enthusiastic discipleship, the poet reverted to his original idealism and came to recognise in man not only Intellect and Reason, but Intuition and Innate Ideas as well. Man is a being of complex personality and high aspirations, catching, at moments of inspiration, echoes of the all-pervading Spirit of Beauty in the universe and disclaiming alliance with transience and decay.† His thoughts wander through eternity and his efforts direct themselves towards the distant goal of Perfection.

The second fundamental principle of Godwin's theory follows very naturally from his rejection of innate ideas. There being no innate ideas in the human mind nor any instinctive principles in the human personality, the merits and defects of man's character are not due to causes beyond our control. We can, by changing the environments and attendant circumstances, bring about a corresponding change, salutary or otherwise, in the human character itself. The present miserable condition of man is entirely due to ignorance. Remove the causes of this ignorance or miscalculation and the effects will disappear. Let the cobwebs of " systematic delusions and half-discovered clandestine

* Prometheus Unbound, II, iii, 55-60, 80.
† Shelley, On Life.

truths " be scattered away and a nobler race of man will arise, whose unclouded intellect and unprejudiced mind will create the earth anew. Injustice and intolerance will cease to oppress and a benevolent system of society will govern all.* The surest way, therefore, of improving the condition of mankind is, according to Godwin, education—not as it is commonly understood but used in its most comprehensive sense, " including every incident that produces an idea in the mind and can give birth to a train of reflections." †

Shelley had, in the same manner as Godwin,‡ bitterly felt the disadvantages of an uncongenial system of education. His experiences at Eton and Oxford had opened his eyes to the urgency of reform in that direction. He had, he himself confesses, " derived little benefit or injury from artificial education " and had " no tutor or adviser from whose lessons and suggestions he had not recoiled with disgust." § When, therefore, the poet, under the sovereign influence of Godwin, came to believe that there are no innate or instinctive elements in the human nature, he was naturally convinced that it was possible to improve man's character by introducing a better and more suitable system of education. Man is a creature of circumstances : change his environments and his character will be changed. " The stuff which the soul is made of, must be in every one the same," and an " extended system of rational and moral unprejudiced education " will certainly render each individual " capable of experiencing that degree of happiness to which each ought to aspire."‖ For, is not the mind *the creation* of education? And does it not assume varied appearances " in proportion to the character imposed upon it " by circumstances and intention? On this principle, Shelley, like all contemporary thinkers of the revolutionary school, based his hopes for the future redemption of man. However depraved or fallen human beings might have been in his own age, they were

* and † Godwin, Political Justice, I, iv.
‡ *Cf.* Godwin, On the Education of Princes (Political Justice).
§ Shelley, Letter to Godwin (Jan. 16, 1812.)
‖ Shelley, Letter to Hogg (Jan. 12, 1811).

capable of being improved and regenerated. Divest every event, which leaves its impress upon character, of " its improper tendency, and evil is annihilated."* Education, in consequence, determines character and leads man to progress or degeneracy in accordance with its nature.

Shelley's conception of education was, however, widely different from that of Godwin. In *Political Justice*, education is regarded as the illumination of the intellect. The human reason is an omnipotent force, which alone can redeem man. It has to be liberated from the bondage of external institutions and conventions of society to be fully effective. Nay more, the rich storehouse of human experience in the form of history must be opened up to its view. The glory of Greece and Rome and of other great nations of the world must inspire and strengthen reason before it can regenerate human society. Shelley was not blind to the important part that reason plays in the development of society and the redemption of man. His hero receives guidance and stimulation from History. Joyously does Laon proclaim to the world how

> " With deathless minds which leave where they have passed
> A path of light, my soul communion knew;
> Till from that glorious intercourse, at last
> As from a mine of magic store, I drew
> Words which were weapons." †

Godwin had also emphatically asserted that opinion is the only bond which perpetuates the slavery of mankind. " In reality the chains fall off, of themselves, when the magic of opinion is dissolved," ‡ *i.e.*, " when a great majority of any society are persuaded to secure any benefit to themselves." The poet held similar views regarding the redemption of man during the earlier part of his poetical career. From " the records of their youthful

* Shelley, Letter to Eliz. Hitchener (Dec. 11, 1811).
† Revolt of Islam, II, xx.
‡ Godwin, Political Justice, I, vi.

state,'' and '' the lore of bards and sages old,'' the reformer should, according to him, '' collect language to unfold truth to his countrymen;''* and when these doctrines of human power are scattered among his fellow-beings, they are sure to

'' .....aspire to more
Than they have ever gained or ever lost of yore.'' †

Parents teach them to their children who are, no longer, blind; the young men are roused into action and bind themselves with vows of faith and constancy, while maidens gather a warmer zeal and a nobler hope from the inspiring messages that they hear.

'' And every bosom was rapt and shook
Like autumn's myriad leaves in one swol'n mountain brook.'' ‡

Nor are the tyrants blind to the potency and strength of this newly-found zeal and determination of the down-trodden multitude; on the contrary, they tremble

'' At voices which are heard about the streets,
The ministers of Fraud can scarce dissemble
The lies of their own heart; but when one meets
Another at the shrine, he inly weets,
Though he says nothing, that the truth is known.'' ‡

The effects of such an educative propaganda are instantaneous; all at once the whole nation seems to be roused from its torpor of centuries. Men are no longer blind, inert and dead. Their hearts are now swept by high hopes and mighty aspirations—

''.....fearless love, and the pure law
Of mild equality and peace, succeeds
To faiths which long have held the world in awe
Bloody, false and cold.''§

* Revolt of Islam, IV, xii.
† *Ibid.* IV, xiii.
‡ *Ibid.*, IV, xi
§ *Ibid.*, IV, xv.

Shelley was, however, equally conscious of the composite nature of the human personality. He soon freed himself from all materialistic illusions regarding the character of the human mind. He had, by this time, come to recognise that man is not intellect alone, but a being in whom the understanding, the imagination and the senses are harmoniously blended together.* To ignore any one aspect is to carry away an entirely false idea of his complex nature. He could not, consequently, accept Godwin's ideals of education. Education could no longer mean the illumination of the intellect alone, but the proper development of the emotions and impulses as well. *The Revolt of Islam* is thus a picture, or a succession of pictures " illustrating the growth and progress of the individual mind aspiring after excellence and devoted to the love of mankind ; its influence in *refining* and making pure the most daring and uncommon *impulses of the imagination*, the *understanding* and the senses."† He thus definitely rejected Godwin's narrow conception of education and enunciated a wider and more rational view which was gradually supplanting the older ideals.

In *Prometheus Unbound* the same view finds a fuller and more poetic expression. Underneath the exquisitely beautiful symbolism of the poet are discernible suggestions of what Shelley regarded as the true ideal of education in the widest sense of the term. Unlike Godwin's Reason, Asia does not, all at once, bring about, by a single touch of her wand as it were, the salvation of mankind. She has to pass through a series of educative experiences before she can redeem Humanity. Even after her powers have been fully developed through proper training, Love cannot regenerate man by her own influence alone. It is only when Asia has an intuitive cognition of the reality behind appearances and becomes united to Demogorgon, the Spirit of Inscrutable Fate and Intuitive Knowledge, *i.e.*, when the emotions and the human understanding are equally and fully developed,

* *Cf.* Revolt of Islam, Preface.
† *Ibid.*

educated and harmoniously blended together, that man becomes perfect.

Education, according to Godwin, is the dissemination of truth. For truth is omnipotent. It dissipates error and prejudice, expels weakness and vice and replaces them by nobler and more benevolent principles. When adequately communicated and brought home to the convictions of the understanding, it creates a revolution in the opinions of men, " infallibly producing a corresponding effect upon their conduct." As there is no limit to the progress of knowledge, man is assuredly susceptible of perpetual improvement. " Every perfection or excellence which human beings are competent to conceive, human beings, unless in cases that are palpably and unequivocally excluded by the structure of their frame, are competent to attain." Nor should we unduly limit the extent of human perfection; for, in many cases, " the lines which appear to prescribe a term to our efforts will, like the mists that arise from a lake, retire farther and farther, the more closely we endeavour to approach them." *

Like Condorcet, Godwin was an ardent believer in the progress of man. He did not regard the development of the arts and sciences as the cause of human degeneracy. On the contrary, the past history of man, his marvellous attainments in all departments of life filled him with a new hope for the future of Humanity. The legend of the " Noble Savage " did not appeal to his imagination: and he could not fail to contrast " man in his original state, with man as we, at present, behold him." " Let us survey the earth covered with the labours of man,.....with all the wonders of painting, poetry, eloquence, and philosophy " and remember the great changes he has undergone as an intellectual being; are we not, then, justified in inferring " the probability of improvements not less essential to be realised in future?" † The arts and sciences are progressive. However highly

* Godwin, Political Justice, I, v.
† *Ibid.*, I, viii.

developed they may be at present, they are capable of still further improvement. " If this be true," asked Godwin, " of all other sciences why not of morals? If this be true of all arts why not of social institutions? " In his case, therefore, the closest deductions of abstract reason coincided with his fondest aspirations; and he could, without the slightest misgiving, participate in the dreams of the Millennium characteristic of his age. It was speculative ideas of this type which brought him solace and upheld his faith in the midst of the darkest days of reaction. He could well bear testimony to the heroic declaration of Gerrald, calmly awaiting the sentence of death—" Moral light is as irresistible as the physical. All attempts to impede its progress are vain. It will roll rapidly along, and as well may tyrants imagine that by placing their feet upon the earth they can stop its diurnal motion, as that they shall be able, by efforts the most virulent and pertinacious, to extinguish the light of reason and philosophy which, happily for mankind, is everywhere spreading around us." *

Deeply interested as he was in the most recent discoveries of science,† Shelley, like his master, could not reconcile himself to the belief in a ' Golden Age ' in the past. The immense progress made by scientific investigations in his own age could not but leave an indelible impression on his mind. Man is fallen, says the Bible. But how is he fallen? asked Shelley. " You find a thing imperfect and diminutive, but you cannot infer that it has degenerated to this state, without first proving that it had anteriorly existed in a perfect state."‡ Is there any ground for this widespread belief? What is its basis?—a mere ancient tradition recorded in the Scriptures, a tradition, which cannot be tested by reason but must be taken on trust. Men may seek to prove that perfection is unattainable; they may produce apparently irrefutable arguments in favour of their contention and ridicule it as

* Brailsford, Shelley, Godwin and their Circle.
† *Cf.* Dowden, Life of Shelley.
‡ Shelley, Letter to Eliz. Hitchener (June 25, 1811).

impossible. Yet, even acknowledging the cogency of such arguments, we have to admit that " perfection, however unattainable it may now appear to us, is the ultimate goal towards which society must move. It demands an unremitting tendency towards itself; and the nearer man approaches this point, the happier will he be." * It was by a close study of human progress that Shelley strengthened his belief in the human Millennium. He was fully " convinced of the eventual omnipotence of mind over matter." And this " golden age when the present potence becomes omnipotence " will, in his opinion, be brought about only by " human reason and human powers whose progression in improvement has been so great since the remotest tradition, tracing general history to the point where we now stand." †

His ardent faith in the perfectibility of human nature bore him up in the midst of despondency and despair; and he became indignant at any the slightest step which, he thought, would impede its progress. The Glorious Revolution of 1688 could not appeal to him. " Was that period," asked the poet, " glorious, when, with a presumption only equalled by their stupidity, and a short-sightedness incommensurable but with the blindest egotism, Parliament affected to pass an Act delivering themselves and their posterity to the remotest period of time, to Mary and William and their posterity? " And his blood boiled to think that the " Defenders of Liberty " had sunk so low as to " attempt to arrest the perfectibility of human nature." ‡ Not that he was blind to the weaknesses and shortcomings of men around him. On the contrary, he was fully conscious of " the overwhelming torrent of depravity which education unlooses." But he was equally conscious of human kindness and goodwill and emphatically asserted that true " education or impressions intentionally induced upon the mind " would foster and " encourage the good in man and eradicate the evil."

* Shelley, Letter to Eliz. Hitchener (July 25, 1811).
† *Ibid.* (Oct. 12, 1811).
‡ *Ibid.* (Feb. 27, 1812).

The pursuit of human perfection was, henceforth, the ruling passion of his life. It determined all his future activities. He went over to Ireland ostensibly to help the Irish patriots in their struggle for religious and political freedom; but there was, all the time, existing in the background of his mind, a desire to " sink the question of present grievance in the more general and remote consideration of a highly perfectible state of society; " and he simply wanted " to embrace the present opportunity for attempting to forward the accomplishment of that event."* He wrote *Queen Mab* not so much for the pleasure of self-expression as to shadow forth, however faintly, his vision of the human Millennium, intending it to be " by anticipation, a picture of the manners, simplicity and delights of a perfect state of society, tho' still earthly." † His other poems had also the same end in view. Shelley had, indeed, a very healthy aversion to didactic poetry and refused to " dedicate his poetical compositions solely to the direct enforcement of reform."‡ For the poet was well aware, that " nothing can be equally well expressed in prose that is not tedious and supererogatory in verse." § Yet, he was always inspired by a sense of the poet's high mission as " the unacknowledged legislator of the world," and sought to elevate his fellow-men by placing before them " beautiful idealisms of moral excellence." Shelley was thoroughly convinced of the beneficial influence of this type of poetry on human personality. It is only when the highly refined imagination of poetical readers is thus inspired that reasoned principles of moral conduct acquire a strength and potency for the regeneration of human society; otherwise they are mere " seeds cast upon the highway of life which the unconscious passenger tramples into dust." ‖ His *Revolt of Islam* is, accordingly, "a succession of pictures illustrating the growth and progress of an individual mind aspiring after excellence." It is " a story of human

* Shelley, Letter to Godwin (March 18, 1812).
† Shelley, Letter to Eliz. Hitchener (Dec. 11, 1811).
‡ and § Prometheus Unbound, Preface.
‖ *Ibid.*

passions in its most universal character," written, not for the sake of the story itself, nor for the clash of contending emotions which it describes, but, " in the view of kindling within the bosom of his readers a virtuous enthusiasm for those doctrines of liberty and justice, that faith and hope in something good, which neither violence, nor misrepresentation, nor prejudice can ever totally extinguish among mankind." * In fact, he wanted to place before his readers a vision of perfection slowly and painfully attained by man, so that they might, in that age of reaction, gather new faith and more ardent aspirations from his impassioned utterances.

In his poetical compositions he always sought to excite in men " a generous impulse, an ardent thirst for excellence and an interest, profound and strong, such as belong to no meaner desires."† The same passionate sympathy for suffering, the same ardent love for man and desire for perfection characterise the *Prometheus Unbound*. The vision of fulfilment and progress which it reveals, the drama of spiritual evolution which it unfolds before our eyes, the transfiguration of the entire universe which marks its great consummation, and the jubilant rejoicings of the world of nature and man which commemorate its achievements,—all are harmoniously blended together into a grand symphony, impressive in its appeal to whatever is good and noble in the human personality. In words burning with deep spiritual significance, the poet appeals to man to rise above the petty meannesses of everyday life into the highest regions of spiritual existence. He inspires his readers with a dream of perfection, of perfection attainable through love and sympathy, through intuitive experiences of reality,

" Not in Utopia, sub-terranean fields,
Or some secreted island, heaven knows where!
But in this very world, which is the world
Of all of us,—the place where in the end
We find our happiness, or not at all "

* and † Revolt of Islam, Preface.

Godwin laid special emphasis upon the withering influence of Positive Institutions. They are responsible for the depravity of human nature and stand in the way of human progress. It is the conservative inertia of modern society which stifles all efforts of man for self-expression and self-realisation. The social fabric is not a passive thing; on the contrary, its influence over the opinions, and through opinions over the character of men is one of the most significant facts of life. Government is not, as Locke said, purely negative, seldom affecting the condition of its subjects; it is an all-pervading power which creates their environments and forms their opinions. It affects the teacher and the taught, the educated and the ignorant alike. "Men who live in a state of equality, or that approaches equality, will be frank, ingenuous, and intrepid in their carriage; while those who inhabit where a great disparity of ranks has prevailed will be distinguished by coldness, irresoluteness, timidity and caution." * Example and early habits plant these sentiments in the mind too deeply to be eradicated. So long as "parents and teachers in general shall fall under the established rule, it is clear that politics and the modes of government will educate and infect us all." †

Moreover these institutions, intimately associated as they are with ideas of rewards and punishments, dictate to individuals their future course of action. Men cease to have a strong personality and become, to all intents and purposes, inert, lifeless, and mechanical. "An influence like this," Godwin significantly pointed out, "is inconsistent with all generous magnanimity of spirit, all ardent impartiality in the discovery of truth, and all inflexible perseverance in its assertion. Countries exposed to the perpetual interference of decrees instead of arguments exhibit within their boundaries the mere phantoms of men." ‡ Government of any type suspends the elasticity and progress of the human mind; it

* Godwin, Political Justice, I, iv.
† *Ibid.*, I, iv.
‡ *Ibid.*, II, vi.

poisons us before we can resist or even suspect its malignity. Depriving us of strength and independence, it is, even in its best state, an evil. Men should be wise enough to govern themselves without the intervention of any compulsory restraint; we should have as little of government as the general peace of human society will permit.* "Above all," reiterated Godwin, "we should not forget that Government abstractedly taken is an usurpation upon the private judgment and individual conscience of mankind; and that, however we may be obliged to admit it as a necessary evil for the present, it behoves us, as friends of reason and the human species, to admit as little of it as possible and carefully to observe whether, in consequence of the gradual illumination of the human mind, that little may not, hereafter, be diminished." †

In fact, Godwin was an individualist by principle and nature as well. He could not tolerate any interference with the free exercise of the individual understanding and was interested only with the progress of men as individuals. He had little love for that great abstraction of the French Revolution—Man. Humanity, Human Perfection, the Millennium were all perfectly meaningless unless they had particular reference to the development of men. What is Society, Community, or even Humanity itself except an aggregate of its members? And what is all improvement worth if it does not contribute to their happiness? But even for the proper development of *men*, some form of organisation is necessary; not however large states with their insatiable greed for self-aggrandisement and their tendency to crush their opponents. The political thought of his age idealised the City States of ancient Greece and Rome. Rousseau had recommended such small states in his discourses and Helvétius sought to divide the Republic of France into a large number of small Federated Commonwealths, "each so small that public opinion and the fear of shame would act powerfully within it." Godwin

* Godwin, Political Justice, III, vii.
† *Ibid.*, V, i.

was also in favour of similar Parish States where no coercion save and except the influence of the censure and the approbation of neighbours and associates will be necessary to promote virtue among their inhabitants. " If communities were contented with a small district, with a proviso of confederation in cases of necessity, every individual would then live under the public eye, and the disapprobation of his neighbours, a species of coercion, not derived from the caprice of man, but from the system of the universe, would inevitably oblige him either to reform or to emigrate." * Such small governments will not tyrannise over men unnecessarily nor will they oppose the progress of the human mind. He was not very definite as to whether these states are meant as merely temporary governments existing only so long as man does not completely free himself from the prejudices, conventions and errors of civilised society ; or as types of the perfect forms of government without any of the disadvantages and imperfections generally associated with it.†

Equally emphatic was Shelley in his criticism of the Positive Institutions that he found prevalent in Society. Like Godwin he was absolutely sure that the miseries of mankind are mainly due to the influence they exert upon the character of human beings. " Prejudice and superstition " alone are inspired by " the system upon which at present the world acts"—a system which constrains men to believe as incontrovertible facts all that they are told.‡ It fetters a reasonable mind with its own traditional beliefs and ideals ; and can never tolerate the least sign of independent speculation. It was against this withering influence of tradition or, as Shelley called it, " long established opinion " that the poet waged an incessant war. He could not accept the principle that one should always comply with this long established opinion expressed in the laws and institutions of his own country. For then " virtue does not exist ; or Proteus-like so changes its appearance with every varying climate. .that

* Godwin, Political Justice, VIII, iii.
† *Ibid.*, III, vii ; also I, vi.
‡ Shelley, Letter to Hogg (Dec. 23, 1810).

each petty river, each chain of mountains, and arm of the sea, constitutes a line of distinction between two different kinds of duties to both of which it is requisite that virtue adapts itself."* Yet such is the power of this irrational idea, so strong is the opinion of the world in its favour that the majority of men are compelled to bow down before these gods of the populace. A rebel from his childhood, Shelley shuddered to think of the effects of this system upon the minds of men; and he spoke very bitterly of this " tremendous Gregory—the opinion of the world, its myriads of hateful champions, and its ten thousands of votaries " † compulsorily plunged into its depths. It is a veritable empire of terror which is established by religion, by monarchy its prototype, by aristocracy and similar other positive institutions that were, at that time, crushing the physical, intellectual and moral independence of man.‡ In *Queen Mab* the poet was more definite. He depicted in lurid colours the pernicious influence of such positive institutions on the mind of man. They blast " the human flower in its tender bud;" their influence darts—

> " Like subtle poison through the bloodless veins of Society;" §

and their specious names

> " Learned in soft childhood's unsuspecting hour,
> Serve as sophism with which manhood dims
> Bright reason's rays." ‖

Their all-pervading power stains the very innocence of childhood; " force and falsehood "—their underlying principles—

> " .....hang even over the cradled babe
> Stifling with rudest grasp all natural good."¶

* and † Shelley, Letters to Hogg (May 13 and 18, 1811).
‡ Shelley, Letter to Eliz. Hitchener (July 26, 1811).
§ Queen Mab, IV, 105-6.
‖ *Ibid.*, IV, 112-14.
¶ *Ibid.*, IV, 11920.

The human mind thus encompassed round with evil is indeed a tragic figure. It is bound

> " Ere it has life; ere all the chains are forged
> Long ere its being, all liberty and love
> And peace is torn from its defencelessness." *

It is

> " Cursed from its birth, even from its cradle doomed
> To abjectness and bondage." †

We do not, however, find in the speculations of Shelley on this question, that attitude of cold dispassionate criticism which characterises the works of Godwin. On the contrary, they are all aglow with passion and resentment. Time and again we seem to hear the impassioned tones of the French Encyclopaedists or catch echoes of the sardonic laughter of Voltaire.‡ And well we might; for while criticising the Church or the State, Shelley was not a mere detached philosopher or critic, he was, above all, a man terribly oppressed by these institutions. He had been personally injured by them and his indignation was all the more bitter as his wounds were fresh. " Oh, I burn with impatience," exclaimed the poet, " for the moment of Christianity's dissolution; it has injured me. I swear on the altar of perjured love to revenge myself on the hated cause of the effect, which even now I can scarcely help deploring. Indeed I think it is to the benefit of Society to destroy the opinion which can annihilate the dearest of ties." § In fact he was very deeply read in the literature of the revolutionary school of thought in France and his bitter denunciations of Christianity and monarchy, his diatribes against civilisation as such, his openly expressed fondness for a simple life led in the midst of

* Queen Mab, IV, 134-36.

† *Ibid*, IV, 137-38.

‡ *Cf.* Voltaire's Articles on Atheism, Christianity and Superstition in the Dictionary of Philosophy and Shelley, Queen Mab, VII, ll. 85 *et seq.*; also VIII, and the Revolt of Islam, V.

§ Shelley, Letter to Hogg (Dec. 20, 1810).

Ibid. (Dec. 26, 1810).

nature and in strict accordance with her dictates—were all more or less inspired by Rousseau, Voltaire, D'Holbach and their followers.

In Shelley's denunciations of Property and Marriage also, echoes of Godwin, his philosophy and even his vocabulary, abound. Godwin looked at the development of property and the consequent unequal distribution of wealth from the standpoint of a speculative thinker powerfully influenced by revolutionary currents of thought. He regarded accumulated wealth as usurpation, pure and simple. Inheritance was a still greater injustice. "It is enough," exclaimed the philosopher, "to maintain men in their usurpation during the terms of their life. It is the most extravagant fiction, which would enlarge the empire of the proprietor beyond its natural existence, and enable him to dispose of events when he is himself no longer in the world." Not that Godwin was blind to the value of wealth and property for the better organisation of human society. He was conscious of the fact that some such stimulus as the acquisition of property was necessary for human progress. "It is perhaps necessary," Godwin asserted, "that a period of monopoly and oppression should subsist before a period of cultivated equality could subsist. Savages, perhaps, would never have been excited to the discovery of truth and the invention of art but by the narrow motives which such a period affords."* But with the passage of time man must have made sufficient progress, both intellectual and spiritual, as to rise above all mean and narrow motives. "Surely, after the savage state has ceased, and men have set out in the glorious career of discovery and invention, monopoly and oppression cannot be necessary to prevent them from returning to a state of barbarism."†

Even if we suppose that it is right for one man to possess a greater portion of property than another, whether as the fruit of his industry or the inheritance of his ancestors,

* and † Godwin, "Enquirer,"—Essay II (quoted by Shelley).

"justice," as Godwin pointed out, "obliges him to regard this property as a trust and calls upon him maturely to consider in what manner it may be employed for the increase of liberty, knowledge and virtue." Remembering, therefore, that wealth is a power usurped by the few to compel the many to labour for their benefit, and that its possession makes a man pusillanimous and wicked, he should hold his inheritance in trust and use it for the amelioration of society. "The thing really to be desired is, consequently, the removing as much as possible such arbitrary distinction, and leaving to talents and virtue the field of exertion unimpaired." The ideal state of society Godwin believed to be a state where all men are equal. Each works only for the satisfaction of his daily needs and has ample leisure for the development of his intellectual powers. "The commodities that substantially contribute to the subsistence of the human species form a very short catalogue: they demand from us but a slender portion of industry. If these only were produced and sufficiently produced, the species of man would be continued."

Again:

"If the labour necessarily required to produce them were equally divided among the poor and, still more, among all, each man's share of labour would be light, and his portion of leisure would be ample....Those hours which are not required for the production of the necessaries of life may be devoted to the cultivation of the understanding, the enlarging of our stock of knowledge, the refining our taste and thus opening to us new and more exquisite sources of enjoyment."*

With Shelley, the admiring pupil of Godwin, "excessive wealth is a libel on its possessor."† Nature created men equal, it is society which has destroyed the original "parity" among them. Property and inequality is, thus, founded upon base falsehood‡ against which it is the duty of every

* Godwin, Enquirer, Essay II.
† Shelley, Declaration of Rights, Sec. 17.
‡ Shelley, Philosophical View of Reform.

reformer to wage incessant war. Not only so, wealth wields a very demoralising influence over its possessor; and the unhappy aristocrat "by an hereditary possession of a fortune, which, if divided would have very different effects, is, as it were, predestined to dissipation, ennui, self-reproach and, to crown the climax, a death-bed of despairing inutility." * In his *Address to the Irish People* he developed the same idea. "Nature never intended that there should be such a thing as a poor man or a rich man. Being put in an unnatural situation, they can neither be happy so far as their situation is concerned. The poor man is born to obey the rich man, though they both came into the world equally helpless and equally naked. But the poor man does the rich no service by obeying him—the rich man does the poor no good by commanding him."†

Like Godwin, again, Shelley was firmly convinced of the fact that wealth was given to man not for mere enjoyment but as a sacred trust. The material resources which a man may possess are, according to the poet, "intrusted to his discretion" by the "consent of mankind."‡ It is, therefore, his first and foremost duty to employ them in such a manner as to contribute his proper share to the improvement of the material and intellectual condition of his fellow-men. And although Shelley was fully aware of the failure of the Primitive Christians to establish the principles of equality‡ in their social life, he was not without hopes that every man would strive to annihilate, in proportion to his wisdom, "the unjust inequality of powers and conditions existing in the world, and accommodate the progress of equality to the progress of wisdom and of virtue among mankind."‡

In fact, Shelley's theory on this matter was based upon other considerations as well. There is, according to him, no wealth but the labour of man. Not money nor the luxuries of life can enrich the world; they cannot add one single com-

* Shelley, Letter to Eliz. Hitchener (July 25, 1811).
† Shelley, Address to the Irish People.
‡ Shelley, Essay on Christianity.

fort to the human race. On the contrary, an excessive regard for money and " precious metals " has been, and will continue to be the bane of human society. It is in consequence of such considerations that " one man is enabled to heap to himself luxuries at the expense of the necessaries of his neighbour ; a system admirably fitted to produce all the varieties of disease and crime, which never fail to characterise the two extremes of opulence and penury." * Naturally he could not understand how " a speculator who employs a number of hands in the manufacture of articles avowedly destitute of use or subservient only to the unhallowed cravings of luxury and ostentation " can ever regard himself as benefiting thereby the labouring poor and promoting his country's prosperity.† The poet looked at England and found there a small minority living in ease and the rest earning their livelihood with toil and care. If these aristocrats who " possess resources of various degrees of immensities, were to permit these resources to be resolved into their original stock, that is, entirely to destroy it, if each earned his own living,—then...each would be happy and contented, and crime and the temptation to crime would scarcely exist."‡

Like his master, Shelley was indignant at the wastage of human energy in modern society. Men labour not for food and raiment nor for " those comforts of civilisation without which civilised men are more miserable than the meanest savages," but for " pride of power, for the miserable isolation of pride, for the false pleasures of the hundredth part of society." " So long as," pointed out Shelley, " we conceive that a wanton expenditure of human labour, not for the necessities, not even for the luxuries of the mass of *society*, but for the egotism and ostentation of a few of its members, is defensible on the ground of public justice, so long we neglect to approximate to the redemption of the human race."§

* and † Shelley, Notes on Queen Mab, V, 93-94.
‡ Shelley, Letter to Eliz. Hitchener (July 26, 1811).
§ *Cf.* Shelley, Notes on Queen Mab, V, 93-94.

He was equally conscious of the fact that leisure is absolutely necessary for moral and intellectual improvement and that society as constituted at present is injurious both to the rich and to the poor. It deprives the poor labouring classes of all opportunities for intellectual improvement by subjecting them to unnecessary labour while it enervates the aristocratic intelligentsia by a total absence of all physical efforts. Its members are, consequently, imperfect; they are but half men for, "he who is deficient in firm health or vigorous intellect is but half a man." An ideal state of society should combine both the advantages of labour and of leisure; the first being necessary for physical and the second for moral improvement.*

These fundamental ideas of Shelley receive a fuller and more emphatic expression in his poems. In *Queen Mab* the poet lamented how—

> "The harmony and happiness of man
> Yields to the wealth of nations; that which lifts
> His nature to the heaven of its pride,
> Is bartered for the poison of his soul;"†

He also pointed out that wealth is

> "The weight that drags to earth man's towering hopes,
> Blighting all prospects but of selfish gain,
> Withering all passion but of slavish fear,
> Extinguishing all free and generous love
> Of enterprise and daring."‡

It

> "Leaves nothing but the sordid lust of self,
> The grovelling hope of interest and gold,
> Unqualified, unmingled, unredeemed,
> Even by hypocrisy."§

* Shelley, Notes on Queen Mab, V, 93-94.
† V, 79-82.
‡ V, 83-87.
§ V, 90-98.

Under its withering influence men lose their manhood and become mere automata, " mere wheels of work," " living pulleys of a dead machine,"—their souls hardened against all hopes and aspirations, untroubled by any spark of Divinity. Thus,

" Poverty and wealth with equal hand
Scatter their withering curses, and unfold
The doors of premature and violent death,
To pining famine and full-fed disease,
To all that shares the lot of human life,
Which poisoned, body and soul, scarce drags the chain,
That lengthens as it goes and clanks behind." *

The ideal of a harmonious development of the physical and intellectual aspects of the human personality Shelley celebrated both in *Queen Mab* and the *Prometheus Unbound*. Man was no longer a mere " wheel of work " or a " living pulley of a dead machine," " hardened to hope and insensible to fear." † He was no longer overburdened by useless toil nor did he minister to the pride and false pleasures of his cruel master. On the contrary, he stood adorning

" This loveliest earth; with taintless body and mind;
Blessed from his birth with all bland impulses
Which gently in his noble bosom wake
All kindly passions and all pure desires." ‡

Happiness and Science dawned upon him and carried him away with irresistible force. Peace cheered his mind and health " renovated his frame." The inequalities of modern society were all eradicated ; the social order with its injustice and cruelty lay mouldering in ruins while Man rose superior to the abject self-contempt and hypocrisy which erstwhile characterised him.§ Nor did the poet forget to bestow upon Redeemed Humanity ample leisure wherein he might retire

* Shelley, Queen Mab, V, 46-52.
† *Ibid.*, V, 75.
‡ *Ibid*, VIII, 199-202.
§ *Cf.* Prometheus Unbound, Act III, Sc. IV, ll. 130 *et seq.*

to his cave and develop his personality by coming into intimate contact with nature and art—searching his own unexhausted spirit for hidden thoughts of imperishable beauty and weaving out of them divine harmonies; catching in the depths of his own heart "echoes of the human world," of the "low voice of Love" and "dove-eyed pity's murmured pain;" or seeking to perpetuate in his own mind reflections of those lovely apparitions which are

> "..... the progeny immortal
> Of painting, sculpture, and rapt poesy
> And arts, though unimagined, yet to be." *

Marriage was another institution which early attracted the attention of the poet. So long as he was under the influence of his environments, Shelley continued to be a firm believer in the traditional view of marriage. *St. Irvyne* contains irrefutable evidence of his close adherence to Orthodoxy. Godwinian arguments against matrimony are here characteristically put in the mouth of the villain, Nompere, and the entire atmosphere of the romance plainly indicates Shelley's mental outlook during that particular period of his life. Nompere might affect not to understand why we should be taught "to believe that the union of two persons who love each other is wicked unless authorised by certain rites and ceremonies;" he might emphatically assert that these ceremonies can never "change the tenor or sentiments which, it is destined, that these two people should entertain of each other." He might regard it to be "an insult to two souls, united to each other in the irrefragible covenants of love and congeniality, to promise, in the right of a Being whom they know not, that fidelity which is certain otherwise." But the answers spiritedly given by the heroine were all in the right orthodox style and although she afterwards succumbed to the allurements of her seducer, the poet himself had no shadow of doubt that the arguments of

* *Cf.* Prometheus Unbound, Act III, Sc. III, ll. 35-56.

the villain were " palpably baseless," mere sophistries designed more to " impose upon her understanding " than to establish any definite principle of morality.*

There are however indications in this romance itself, specially towards its end, that the poet's study of Godwin was slowly and imperceptibly influencing his mind. Marriage had already lost its sacramental character. It was no longer a mysterious union of souls. On the contrary, it became, " a mere human institution incapable of furnishing that bond of union by which alone intellect can be conjoined."

Though not yet invested with that sinister and harmful character which marked his later denunciations of this particular institution, it had, by this time, degenerated into a harmless surrender " to the prejudices of the world wherein we live; " " a simple procuring of moral expediency, at a slight sacrifice of what we conceive to be right."† Shelley was plainly moving away from orthodoxy and leaning dangerously towards Godwin.

In his *Political Justice* Godwin painted a dismal picture of married life. He significantly pointed out that marriage as practised in European countries is nothing but a union contracted, without any serious consideration of future developments, by persons who are absolutely inexperienced in worldly matters. " A thoughtless and romantic youth of each sex come together, see each other for a few times and under circumstances full of delusion and then vow eternal attachment." Is it any wonder then that they should, in most cases, find themselves cruelly deceived? The disillusionment which follows is, by the very nature of the case, irretrievable. The victims can only make the best of their mistake. They must " shut their eyes upon realities," and drag along this heavy burden of matrimony " happy if, by any perversion of intellect, they can persuade themselves that they were right in their first crude opinion of their companion."‡

* Shelley, St. Irvyne, Ch. IX.
† *Ibid*, Ch. XII.
‡ Godwin, Political Justice, VIII, viii.

It is only natural that such a powerful delineation of the evils of the marriage-system as it then existed in European society should make a lasting impression in the mind of a poet who had already accepted Godwin as the preceptor of his youth. The conclusion of the philosopher that "no ties ought to be imposed upon either party preventing them from quitting the attachment whenever their judgment directs them to do so" * now appeared to be perfectly rational; and within a year after the publication of St. Irvyne we find Shelley denouncing matrimony in terms which, in their bitterness, are vividly reminiscent of his master. "A kind of ineffable sickening disgust," wrote the poet to Hogg as early as 1811† "seizes my mind when I think of this most despotic, most unrequited fetter (*viz.*, marriage) which prejudice has forged upon mankind to confine its energies." For, has not Godwin said that "marriage is hateful, detestable"? It had become all the more hateful and detestable to Shelley by its association with religion which the youthful poet regarded as nothing better than superstition; and conscious though he might be of the fact, that human nature being what it is, a general reform was, in his age, practically impossible, the enthusiastic disciple of Godwin, none the less, readily welcomed anti-matrimonialism as a step towards reform. "Human nature taken in the mass, if we compare it with instances of individual virtue, is corrupt beyond all hope;—for *these*, laws are necessary; *these* are not men of honour; they are not capable of exaltations of virtue." Yet any step, however small, "for the obviation of the present evils is good, as it tends to produce that which, though impossible, yet, were it possible, would be desirable. On this plan do I recommend anti-matrimonialism." ‡

He was, however, fully aware of the strong citadel which the social organisation of the age had set up to defend itself from all attacks of rationalism and reform. Marriage was a

* Godwin, Political Justice, VIII, viii.
† June 12, 1811.
‡ Shelley, Letter to Hogg (May 13, 1811).

fruit of superstition and superstition must perish before it could fall. The first reformers would have to undergo great persecution; society is essentially conservative and any attempt to go against accepted opinions and long-established traditions is bound to have its natural reaction on the reformers as well as on the society in which they live. So when the poet married Harriet, consideration for "the disproportionate sacrifice which the female is called upon to make" * made him pause and reflect. The orthodox view on this matter might be wholly wrong and unjust. Marriage might indeed be an evil of "immense and extensive magnitude." But man being what he is, the environments in the midst of which he lives so transform his character that he finds it very difficult, if not impossible, to break through the bonds of universally accepted traditions. What was, in its origin, merely casual thus becomes fundamental. "That which hath no more to do with virtue"—so Shelley asserted—"than the most indifferent is exalted into its criterion." It is, therefore "useless to attempt by singular examples to renovate the state of society, until reasoning has made so comprehensive a change as to emancipate the experimentalist from the resulting evils and the prejudice with which his opinions would be heard by the immense majority." †

But this did not mean that he had given up his original opinions on marriage; on the contrary, his poems and essays, and his whole life—all show a gradually hardening antipathy towards popular and traditionary views on matrimony. The greatest misfortunes of his life could not change the poet's opinions in the slightest degree. The death of Harriet was indeed a severe blow to him. Equally painful were the attempts of his erstwhile relatives to secure from the Court of Chancery a verdict that he was unfit to act as a guardian to his own children. Shelley was deeply moved. He was going to be declared "incapable of the most sacred of human duties and the most inestimable of human rights" simply

* Shelley, Letter to Hogg (undated).
† Shelley, Letter to Eliz. Hitchener (Oct. 8, 1811).

because he had publicly expressed certain heterodox views on "marriage in its present stage" and sought to act in strict accordance with his convictions. Instead of being overwhelmed by mental distress, the poet fearlessly confronted his accusers with a reaffirmation of his earlier principles. The institution of marriage he still considered to be, in the present stage of its development, mischievous and tyrannical, and he did not shrink from setting forth in unmistakable terms, the grounds for his rejection of the orthodox standpoint. If his opinions were, so the poet urged, the sole reason why he should be deprived of the custody of his children; then it would assuredly be an evil day for "men of a liberal and enquiring spirit." The Courts of Justice would then become "mere instruments of private vengeance," directing their edicts, at the slightest divergence from the accepted opinions of the multitude, "against the deepest and the most sacred instincts of the human heart."* This dignified protest acquires greater significance when we remember that it was made not by a philosopher in the course of an academic discussion, but by an affectionate father anxiously waiting for a decision fraught with far-reaching consequences to his future life. Nor can his marriage with Mary be regarded in any way, as indicative of a definite change in his outlook. It was, as has been very pertinently pointed out by Dowden, a mere concession to public opinion or rather to the importunate desire of his partner in life. It made absolutely "no difference to Shelley;" but "Mary desired it specially because her new position would restore her to her father." The poet remained as firm in his attitude as he had been before.

The despotism of positive institutions, Shelley regretted, had invaded even the domestic hearth of man. "Law pretends to govern the indisciplinable wanderings of passion, to put fetters on the clearest deductions of reason, and by appeals to the will, to subdue the involuntary affections of our nature." Basing his views on an utilitarian interpretation of ethics, the poet pointed out that "if the worthi-

* Shelley's Statement before the Court (as quoted by Dowden).

ness of any action is to be estimated by the quantity of pleasurable sensation it is calculated to produce," then, surely, the marriage tie is sacred so long as it contributes to the mutual happiness of the parties concerned, and should be " naturally dissolved," when its evils preponderate over its benefits. A husband and wife should live together only so long as they love each other, they should cease to do so as soon as their affection fades away. Any law to the contrary which seeks to bind what nature has separated is morally wrong and as such should not be tolerated ; " any law which should compel them (a married couple) to co-habitation for one moment after the decay of their affection, would be a most intolerable tyranny,"—a " vestige of semi-feudal savageness and imperfect civilisation." Such compulsory unions make hypocrites of the majority of men ; and the result is that " persons of delicacy and virtue, unhappily united to one whom they find it impossible to love, spend the loveliest season of their life in unproductive efforts to appear otherwise than they are, for the sake of the feelings of their partners or the welfare of their mutual offspring;" while those of less generosity and refinement " openly avow their disappointment and linger out the remnant of the union, which only death can dissolve, in a state of incurable bickering and hostility."* Equally pernicious is the effect of such loveless marriages on the children. From their very infancy they are nursed in an atmosphere of bitterness and hatred. Their education takes its colour from the squabbles of their parents and they grow up into useless and morose members of society. As a contrast to this gloomy picture Shelley was always careful to point out the advantages of separation by mutual consent when love is dead. Man may then find in the society of more congenial partners that happiness which is for ever denied him by the despotism of marriage. Each of the partners thus separated become useful and happy members of society " who whilst united would have been miserable and rendered misanthropical by misery."

* Shelley, Note on Queen Mab, V. 179.

In fact the poet, blinded by the glare of Godwinian ethics and Godwinian philosophy, failed to recognise the patent fact that the unit of society as it is at present constituted being the family, any opinion subversive of the permanence of domestic life strikes at the very root of the social organisation. He lacked the vision of a far-seeing reformer who preserves whatever adds to the stability of society and changes only those elements which retard its growth. Naturally in his ideal world despotic law could not stifle the impulses of the human heart and

> "...that sweet bondage which is Freedom's self,
> And rivets with sensation's softest tie
> The kindred sympathies of human souls,
> Needed no fetters of tyrannic law:
> Those delicate and timid impulses
> In nature's primal modesty arose,
> And with undoubted confidence disclosed
> The growing longings of its dawning love." *

Nor was human love any longer needlessly restrained by

> ".....dull and selfish chastity,
> That virtue of the cheaply virtuous,
> Who pride themselves in senselessness and frost." †

In his own life also, he had the greatest admiration for her who, in the wintry solitude of his existence, came, breaking the rude chains of custom, to bestow on him the sweet companionship of her affections.

> " How beautiful and calm and free thou wert
> In thy young wisdom, when the mortal chain
> Of custom thou didst burst and rend in twain,
> And walked as free as light the clouds among,
> Which many an envious slave then breathed in vain
> From his dim dungeon.....‡

* Queen Mab, IX, 76-83. *Cf.* ll. 225 *et seq.*
† *Ibid*, IX, 84-86.
‡ Dedication to the " Revolt of Islam."

In *Rosalind and Helen* again, Shelley described the pernicious effects of loveless marriages. Compelled to marry a hard, selfish and covetous old man, Rosalind passed a life of constraint fulfilling her duties as a devoted wife,

> " With the stern step of vanquished will,
> Walking beneath the *night* of life,
> Whose hours extinguished, like slow rain
> Falling for ever, pain by pain,
> The very hope of death's dear rest." *

Her heart was dispossessed of its natural life, and all delights became unreal shadows. When her husband died she sat "with hard and tearless eyes," unable to weep beside his unlamented tomb, "wrapt in the mask of mourning weed." As a contrast to the miserable condition of this unloved wife the poet gave us the picture of Helen who loved and united " all that in us was yet divided." Lionel, the lover, was, like Shelley, a disciple of the revolutionary school of thought and did not accept the traditionary rites of marriage and

> ".....when he said, that many a rite,
> By men to bind but once provided,
> Could not be shared by him and me
> Or they would kill him in their glee," †

the heart of Helen which was still under the influence of orthodox opinions shuddered for a while. Soon, however, she recovered courage and then laughing said—

> " We will have rites our faith to bind,
> But our church shall be the starry night,
> Our altar the grassy earth outspread,
> And our priest the muttering wind." ‡

* ll. 330-34. *Cf.* ll. 225 *et seq.*
† ll. 846-49.
‡ ll. 851-54.

In spite of persecutions and sorrows, the life of this loving couple was one long dream of happiness. Such was the harmony between them that they lost their distinctive personalities and became one "soul of interwoven flame." Touched by the fire of sacred love, each seemed to gain a new life in the midst of the cares and anxieties of their earthly existence. They awoke, as it were, into a

> "second birth
> In worlds diviner far than earth," *

and when Lionel died, his companion did not sit with tearless and hard eyes but

> ".....fell, as the eagle on the plain
> Falls when life deserts her brain,
> And the mortal lightning is veiled again." †

During the latter part of his poetical career, when Shelley fell under the influence of Plato, these ideas were further strengthened by the Platonic theory of love; and the result was that though Godwin receded from his original position Shelley clung to it more tenaciously than ever. Thirsting, as he always did, for an intimate communion with a spirit similar to himself, and seeking throughout the world a prototype of his own personality, the poet could not rest satisfied with one single companion of his soul. In *Epipsychidion* he frankly admitted

> "I never was attached to that great sect,
> Whose doctrine is, that each one should select
> Out of the crowd a mistress or a friend,
> And all the rest, though fair and wise, commend
> To cold oblivion, though it is in the code
> Of modern morals....." ‡

* ll. 980-81.
† ll. 1184-86.
‡ ll. 149-53.

and he seemed to echo his former words in *Queen Mab* when he described the misery which attends upon a strict adherence to the accepted theory of marriage; pointing out how such men have to go the dreariest and the longest journey of their life in the company of "one chained friend," or "perhaps a jealous foe." "True love," the poet proceeded to express,

> " True love in this differs from gold or clay,
> That to divide is not to take away." *

Instead of arguments or reason he was satisfied with poetical similes. Understanding grows bright by gazing on *many* truths; the light of imagination gathers its materials from the earth and the sky and from the depths of human fantasy, enlightening the world from a thousand prisms or mirrors, as it were. Why should not love act in a similar manner, gathering strength from *many* hearts and beautifying the universe from a thousand personalities? † Surely, narrow is

> " The heart that loves, the brain that contemplates,
> The life that wears, the spirit that creates
> One object and one form, and builds thereby
> A sepulchre for its eternity." ‡

The inevitable reaction followed. Shelley struggled through the wintry forest of his life, vainly seeking for " the soul out of his soul."§ He searched for his ideal of beauty in many mortal forms‖ and would often grasp his hands in ecstasy thinking that he had, at last, met the spirit of his visioned wanderings. But on every occasion he found that what he regarded to be real was a mere illusion. Even Emilia Viviani became "a part of him that was already dead ;" and it was very late in life that he recognised that his attempts to find the vision of a poet's imagination among

* ll. 160-61.
† *Cf.* ll. 162-69.
‡ ll. 170-73.
§ ll. 249 *et seq.*
‖ l. 267.

the daughters of men * were destined to fail. Ixion-like he had been catching at clouds which immediately melted away into nothingness.

Equally influenced by Godwin was Shelley in his opinions on other institutions of Society. Military organisations and military exploits, except for self-defence, Godwin could not tolerate. "War and Conquest," he pointed out, "cannot be beneficial to the community. Their tendency is to elevate a few at the expense of the rest, and consequently they will never be undertaken but when the many are the instruments of the few."† The so-called glory which urges men to war and conquest, is as pernicious as other incitements based upon a false conception of national prestige and national security. Analysis strips them of all glamour and reveals the grossness of military exploits in all their cruelty. War is unreasonable. It is, according to Godwin, the crudest method for judging disputes. "Because nations were susceptible of a similar weakness (*viz.*, of being liable to error and of suffering their apprehensions of justice to be perverted by a bias in favour of themselves) and could find no sufficient umpire to whom to appeal, war was introduced. Men were induced deliberately to seek each other's life and to adjudge the controversies between them, not according to the dictates of reason and justice but as either should prove most successful in devastation and murder."‡ What was, at the first instance, of rare occurrence, resorted to only when every other means for a pacific settlement had failed and exasperation had reached its highest limit, afterwards became frequent and habitual. It was soon converted into a profession and we have, since then, been confronted with the spectacle of "one part of the nation paying another part to murder and be murdered in their stead." The most trivial cause, a supposed insult or a sally of youthful ambition now becomes a sufficient incentive to plunge nations into war and deluge provinces with blood.

* Shelley, Letter to Gisborne.
† and ‡ Godwin, Political Justice, V, xvi.

The horrors of war cannot, according to Godwin, be adequately described. Let us visit, at least in imagination, a field of battle and we shall, at once, be painfully aware of the significance of war. "Here men deliberately destroy each other by thousands, without any resentment against, or even knowledge of each other. The plain is strewed with death in all its various forms. Anguish and wounds display the diversified modes in which they can torment the human frame. Towns are burnt, ships are blown up in the air while the mangled limbs descend on every side; the fields are laid desolate, the wives of the inhabitants exposed to brutal insult and their children driven forth to hunger and nakedness. It would be despicable to mention, along with the scenes of horror, and the total subversion of all ideas of moral justice they must occasion in the auditors and spectators, the immense treasures which are wrung in the form of taxes from those inhabitants whose residence is at a distance from the scene."*

Nor is the influence of a system of military organisation at all salutary, both for those who are subject to its discipline and those who, though exempted from such discipline, belong to the same community. Artless and inexperienced at the time of enlistment, the soldier, dragged unwillingly from his peaceful home into the field of battle, soon becomes a depraved and unnatural being. War with him has degenerated into "a trade by which a man sells his skill in murder and the safety of his existence for a pecuniary recompense." He is brutalised by constantly reverting to the ideals of his profession, ideals of violence and force which can never conform to righteousness and virtue. He is thus, "cut off from the rest of the community, and has sentiments and a rule of judgment peculiar to himself."† The soldier is, of all descriptions of men, the most completely a machine; yet his profession inevitably teaches him something of dogmatism, swaggering and self-consequence.‡ He loses his faith in

* Godwin, Political Justice, V, xvi.
† Godwin, Political Justice, V, xix.
‡ Godwin, Enquirer, Essay V.

reason and his very dexterity and skill in arms makes him liable to a certain " obliquity of understanding which these accomplishments are calculated to nourish." * Not only so, the other members of the community, being accustomed for a long time to thoughts of murder and desolation, catch the contagion. They have no longer any distaste of violence nor any implicit confidence in reason and righteousness. The nation, to secure its safety, loses its soul.

Even from his early youth, Shelley was bitter in his denunciation of war and its attendant barbarities; and the arguments that he adduced in favour of his contentions are, more or less strongly, reminiscent of Godwinian theories and Godwinian principles. Like Godwin, the poet was very emphatic in his assertion that war is not, in the least, necessary either for the happiness or the safety of the nation at large. It can never contribute to the general happiness, enriching as it does the few at the expense of the many. The rich fatten themselves on the spoils of war, gaining exclusively from the increase of their national wealth and the extension of their national boundaries. On the contrary, the poor " purchase this wealth at the expense of their blood and labour and happiness and virtue. They die in battle for this infernal cause. Their labour supplies money and food for carrying it into effect; their happiness is destroyed by the oppression they undergo; their virtue is rooted out, by the depravity and vice that prevail throughout the army and which, under the present system, is perfectly unavoidable." † And what is their recompense for all this sacrifice?—mere glory, an elusive thing, " a word, which has often served as a cloak to the ambition and avarice of statesmen."

The horrors of war left as indelible an impression on the mind of Shelley as it did on that of Godwin. Like his master, the poet also shrank from the disgusting details of concerted murder which goes by the name of war. And throughout his poetical works we get startling glimpses

* Godwin, Political Justice, V. xix.
† Shelley, Address to the Irish People.

of the terrible sufferings which follow in the wake of military expeditions. The glare of conflagrations, the deafening peals of artillery,

> " The falling beam, the shriek, the groan, the shout,
> The ceaseless clangour and the rush of men
> Inebriate with rage;—"*

" the frantic wail of widowed love and the faint moan of the dying warrior "†—all reveal a scene too ghastly for human sight to bear. And then dawn discovers a still more harrowing situation :

> " .....There tracks of blood
> Even to the forest's depth, and scattered arms,
> And lifeless warriors, whose hard lineaments
> Death's self could change not, mark the dreadful path
> Of the outsallying victors: far behind,
> Black ashes note where their proud city stood."‡

Laon of Argolis witnesses a similar scene.—"In the midst," says he,

> " I paused, and saw, how ugly and how fell
> O Hate! thou art, even when thy life thou shedd'st
> For Love." §

With a blanched face he looks upon the horrible sight, he observes how

> " The combatants with rage most horrible
> Strove, and their eyes started with cracking stare,
> And impotent their tongues they lolled into the air,
> Flaccid and foamy, like a mad dog's hanging;
> Want and moon-madness and the pest's swift Bane
> When its shafts smite—while yet its bow is twanging
> Have each their mark and sign—some ghastly stain!"§

* Queen Mab, IV, ll. 43-45.
† *Cf. Ibid.*, IV, ll. 55-57.
‡ *Ibid.*, IV, 62-67.
§ The Revolt of Islam, VI, xvi and xvii.

And in the anguish of his heart, the patriot cries out—

" And this was thine, O war! of hate and pain
Thou loathed slave! " *

War is thus, "the statesman's game, the priest's delight, the lawyer's jest and the hired assassin's trade." †

Nor less conscious was the poet of the demoralising influence of war and its attendant military organisation on the minds of men. The description that he gave of the depraved condition of soldiers bears a very close resemblance to similar passages in Godwin's *Political Justice*. Like Godwin he was conscious that these poor men are, almost always, dragged unwillingly from their happy homes.

" They cajole with gold,
And promises of fame, the thoughtless youth
Already crushed with servitude: he knows
His wretchedness too late, and cherishes
Repentance for his ruin, when his doom
Is sealed in gold and blood." ‡

But soon his nature undergoes a remarkable transformation. And soldiers, as a class, become the sinks and channels of the worst vice, the refuse of society, the dregs of all that is most vile.

" .....Their cold hearts blend
Deceit with sternness, ignorance with pride,
All that is mean and villainous, with rage
Which hopelessness of good, and self-contempt,
Alone might kindle." §

* The Revolt of Islam, VI, xvii.
† Queen Mab, IV, 168-70.
‡ *Ibid.*, IV, 190-95.
§ *Ibid.*, IV, 182-86.

They are so far brutalised that they, without a shudder, turn a deaf ear to the groans of their victims and sell their souls

> " For the gross blessings of a patriot mob
> For the vile gratitude of heartless kings,
> And a cold world's good word—viler still.*

Much more graphic, and much more influenced by Godwin is the characterisation of war and its evil influence on the minds of men which we get in *A Philosophical View of Reform*. " When men mourn at funerals," lamented the poet, " for what do they mourn in comparison with the calamities which they hasten with every circumstance of festivity to suffer and to inflict! Visit in imagination the scene of a field of battle or a city taken by assault, collect into one group the groans and the distortions of the innumerable dying, the inconsolable grief and horror of their surviving friends, the hellish exultation and the unnatural drunkenness of destruction of the conquerors, the burning of harvests and the obliteration of the traces of cultivation " † and you will, assuredly, have some idea of the devastations of war. There is, about this passage, an unmistakable Godwinian ring which cannot escape even a casual student of *Political Justice*.

Moreover the poet, like his teacher, was very apprehensive lest military habits which had already established itself in the community should be perpetuated. For according to Shelley, and to Godwin as well, "war, though the practice of it under the present state of the human species, may, in some instances, be unavoidable, is an idea pregnant with calamity and vice."‡ Especially pernicious is its effect on the character of the soldiers themselves. "From the moment that a man is a soldier, he becomes a slave. He is taught obedience; his will is no longer, which is the most sound prerogative of men, guided by his own judgment. He is taught to despise

* Queen Mab, V, 211-13.
† Shelley, A Philosophical View of Reform.
‡ Godwin, Political Justice, V, xix.

human life and human suffering...He is more degraded than a murderer; he is like the bloody knife which has stabbed and feels not: a murderer we may abhor and despise; a soldier, is, by profession, beyond abhorrence and below contempt." * As we read this denunciation of military organisation and its evil influence we are at once reminded of *The Enquirer, Essay V*, where Godwin puts forth all his strength of sarcasm to heap contempt and ignominy upon the entire military profession.

Equally conscious was Shelley of the evil influence of war on the community at large. "War," he significantly pointed out, "waged from whatever motive, extinguishes the sentiment of reason and justice in the mind. The motive is forgotten, or only adverted to in a mechanical and habitual manner. A sentiment of confidence in brute force and in a contempt of death and danger is considered the highest virtue, when in truth, and however indispensable, they are merely the means and the instrument, highly capable of being perverted to destroy the cause they were assumed to promote."† After centuries of insensate militarism, the Great War with its attendant horrors has but recently opened the eyes of men to the truth of what Shelley wrote a hundred years ago.

Godwin devoted an entire Book‡ of his *Political Justice* to a consideration of *Opinion as a Subject of Political Institution*. He looked at the question from all points of view and arrived at the conclusion that "all which can be asked, on the part of a government, in behalf of morality and virtue, is a clear stage upon which for them to exert their own energies and perhaps some restraint, for the present, upon the violent disturbers of the peace of society so that the efforts of these principles may be allowed to go on uninterrupted to their genuine conclusion." § He was thus an out-and-out supporter of absolute freedom of thought and expression.

* and † Shelley, A Philosophical View of Reform.
‡ Book VI.
§ Godwin, Political Justice, VI, i.

He was fully conscious of the weapon, terrible in its efficacy for stifling independent speculation, which the law of libel puts into the hands of established authority. These rules and regulations, he very pertinently pointed out, are always " a continual instrument of usurpation and injustice to the ruling party." Couched as they are in an ambiguous language they are liable to very wide interpretation and, the interest of the judge and the prosecutor being in the peculiar circumstances of the case the same, the accused is placed in a very dangerous situation. He can expect little justice from them. " No reasonings will appear fair to them but such as are futile. If I speak with energy, they will deem me inflammatory; and if I describe censurable proceedings in plain and homely but pointed language, they will cry out upon me as a buffoon." Moreover, expression of opinion is hedged round by so many restrictions as to make it very difficult, if not impossible, for any thinker to urge his point of view effectively. The writer must be logical and not eloquent. Though keenly alive to the absurdity of the established opinion he must restrain his sense of humour and carefully desist from producing feelings of ridicule in his readers. "It were better," exclaimed Godwin, "to forbid me the discussion of the subject altogether than to forbid me to describe it in the manner I conceive to be most suitable to its merits."*

The same difficulties impressed themselves on the mind of Shelley. He was literally amazed that his countrymen should still boast of the Freedom of the Press, when they saw it " successfully muzzled and outraged by the lawyers of the Crown;" and proceeded to analyse the interpretation given to the word " libel " by legal authorities. Like Godwin, he very significantly pointed out that the terms which are specially associated with libel are too vague and indefinite. " Is not law with them," protested the poet, " as clay in the potter's hand?" " It is," according to him, " impossible to express yourself displeased at certain proceed-

* Godwin, Political Justice, VI, vi.

ings of Government, or the individuals who conduct it without uttering a reproach. We cannot honestly point out a proper remedy of grievances with safety, because the very mention of these grievances will be reproachful to the personages who countenance them; and therefore will come under a definition of libel." Under these circumstances the poet was entirely justified when he asked, " Is there anything like the liberty of the press in restrictions so positive yet pliant as these?" Naturally he came to the inevitable conclusion that "the little freedom we enjoy in this most important point comes from the clemency of our rulers, or their fear, lest public opinion, alarmed at the discovery of its enslaved state, should violently assert a right to extension and diffusion." *

Equally unreasonable, according to Godwin, is the system of religious conformity. "One of the most striking instances of the injurious effects of the political patronage of opinion as it at present exists in the world, is to be found in the system of religious conformity." It is pernicious. It takes away from men their liberty of thought and creates a concourse of hypocrites. Men are fettered at the very outset by having a code of propositions put into their hand, in a conformity to which all their enquiries must terminate; and they are further taught, indirectly though it be, that although they may not believe in certain principles, they may subscribe to them provided they refrain from questioning their truth. From a discussion of these aspects of the question, Godwin finally came to hold that " if public worship be conformable to reason, reason without doubt will prove adequate to its vindication and support. If it be from God, it is profanation to imagine that it stands in need of the alliance of the state." †

His arguments received greater weight from a consideration of more fundamental principles. Godwin was a bitter opponent of the political superintendence of all types of

* Shelley, Address to the Irish People.
† Godwin, Political Justice, VI, ii.

opinion. From the standpoint of a utilitarian thinker he was very careful to point out that society in its corporate capacity, being liable to be fettered by the prejudices and weaknesses of its leaders, cannot always arrive at a just and wise conclusion and, as such, it should not be allowed to control opinion. Nor can it improve opinion, for opinions are based upon the perceptions of the understanding which cannot be coerced into conformity. Its regulations cannot regulate in the proper sense of the term, specially if they directly contradict the propensities and the spirit of the nation.

Moreover such attempts at regulating public opinion is very harmful to society. It checks the progress of knowledge and effectively retards reforms. "Considered with a view to the introduction of any favourable changes in society it is altogether impotent. But though it be inadequate to change, it is powerful to prolong." Not only so, such superintendence of public opinion produces mental torpor and imbecility. "He that, in any degree consigns to another the task of dictating his opinions and his conduct, will cease to enquire for himself or his enquiries will be languid. He will accept opinions without understanding them, learning them by rote as it were." In fact, "a system inviting men to the profession of certain opinions by the proffer of a reward and deterring them from a severe examination of their justice by penalties and disabilities does not content itself with habitually unnerving the mind of the great mass of mankind through all its ranks but provides for its own continuance by debauching and terrifying the few individuals, who, in the midst of the general emasculation, might still retain their curiosity and love of enterprise."*

Equally strong was Shelley in his condemnation of religious establishments and the system of religious conformity. He was specially bitter against disabilities which are inflicted upon men on account of their religion. "What benefit can we derive from persecuting men for their religious opinions?" asked the poet. "Why do we persecute them?—to make

* Godwin, Political Justice, VI, i.

them believe as we do? Can anything be more barbarous or foolish?" And like his master Godwin, the poet was emphatic in his assertion that coercion or the imposition of religious tests can only create hypocrites and not believers. "Although we may make people say they believe as we do, they will not in their hearts do any such thing, indeed they cannot; this devilish method can only make them false hypocrites." Belief, according to Shelley and Godwin alike, is an involuntary act based upon a perception of truth. It cannot be imposed upon any individual. No amount of persecution can really alter a man's opinion. It is altered only when you persuade him that your opinion is right and true, and this can be done by an appeal to his reason alone, not by anything else.* Strongly imbued with the idea that rewards and punishments can have reference only to voluntary acts, Shelley could not possibly understand "how merit or demerit can be attached to what is distinct from that faculty of the mind whose presence is essential to their being." † He, consequently, considered all disabilities suffered on account of faith to be unjustifiable. "To take away a man's rights and privileges, to call him a heretic or to think worse of him, when, at the same time, you cannot help owning that he has committed no fault is the grossest tyranny and intoleration." ‡ And in terms strongly reminiscent of Godwin he concluded: "Either the Christian religion is true or it is false. If true, it comes from God, and its authenticity can admit of dispute and doubt, no further than its Omnipotent Author is willing to allow;—if true, it admits of rational proof and is capable of being placed equally beyond controversy."

Unlike Godwin, however, Shelley did not look at the question from the utilitarian standpoint at all. He did not argue whether it is possible for society to regulate public opinion or whether even if it is possible, it checks

* Shelley, Address to the Irish People.
† Shelley, Letter to Lord Ellenborough.
‡ Shelley, Address to the Irish People.

human progress or not. He did not expatiate upon the pernicious influence of such censorship upon the mental development of man. On the contrary, he took his stand on far other principles—principles more idealistic in nature than what were suggested by Godwin in his *Political Justice*. But even when he viewed the whole problem from an idealistic standpoint, he could not escape the influence of his master. Godwin had, time and again, enunciated the theory that "truth and virtue are competent to fight their own battles. They do not need to be nursed and patronised by the hand of power."* Taking his cue from Godwin, his disciple Shelley was very emphatic in his view that "that which is false will ultimately be controverted by its own falsehood. That which is true needs but publicity to be acknowledged. It is ever a proof that the falsehood of a proposition is felt by those who use power and coercion, not reasoning and persuasion, to procure its admission." Again : " Falsehood skulks in holes and corners, ' it lets 'I dare not,' wait upon 'I would,' like the poor cat in the adage,' except when it has power, and then, as it was a coward, it is a tyrant ; but the eagle eye of truth darts through the undazzling sun-beam of the immutable and just, gathering thence wherewith to vivify and illuminate a universe ! "†

The second fundamental principle on which Shelley based all his arguments in favour of toleration is the inherent right of man to think and express his thoughts. In this case also he was profoundly influenced by Godwinian doctrines. One of the reasons why *Political Justice* denounces the censorship of public opinion is that it prevents the free use of reason and produces intellectual inertia.‡ And throughout the treatise the one principle on which Godwin laid special emphasis is the intellectual nature of man and his duty and right to develop it. No theory and no ideal can receive

* Godwin, Political Justice, VI, i.

† Shelley, Letter to Lord Ellenborough. This passage is closely modelled on what Shelley said in his *Proposals for an Association* :—" The eye of virtue, eagle-like, darts through the undazzling beam of eternal truth, and from the undiminished fountain of its purity, gathers wherewith to vivify and illuminate a universe."

‡ Godwin, Political Justice, VI, i.

the approbation of this *thinker* unless and until it passes this test. In Shelley also, we find a similar insistence on the important part that reason plays in the development of human character. "Man has a heart to feel, a brain to think, and a tongue to utter. The laws of his moral as of his physical nature are immutable, as is everything of nature; nor can the ephemeral institutions of human society take away those rights, annihilate or strengthen the duties that have for their basis the imperishable relations of his constitution." * Man has, therefore, a right to unrestricted liberty of discussion.† He has "not only a right to express his thoughts but it is his duty to do so;"‡ and, consequently, Government, being "a delegation of individuals for the purpose of securing their rights, can have no undelegated power of restraining the expression of their opinion." § The poet lamented indeed that credulity and fanaticism had, for ages, stifled the independent speculations of man, that "implicit faith and fearless enquiry have, in all ages, been irreconcilable enemies;"‖ and he recommended the widest toleration of opinion, holding that no person is accountable for his belief or unbelief if his actions are virtuous and moral.¶

The poet reached the height of his eloquence in his address to Lord Ellenborough on the question of the trial and conviction of Mr. Eaton and his words tingled with righteous indignation when he appealed to the Noble Lord to consider the dire consequences of his legal interpretation. "I will demand," exclaimed Shelley, "if that man is not rather entitled to the respect than the discountenance of society, who, by disputing a received doctrine, either proves its falsehood and inutility, thereby aiming at the abolition of what is false and useless, or gives to its adherents an opportunity of

* Shelley, Proposals for an Association of Philanthropists for Ireland.
† Shelley, Declaration of Rights, XII.
‡ *Ibid.*, XIII.
§ *Ibid.*, XXII.
‖ Shelley, Letter to Lord Ellenborough.
¶ *Cf.* Shelley, Address to the Irish People.

establishing its excellence and truth.—Surely this can be no crime. Surely the individual who devotes his time to fearless and unrestricted enquiry into the grand questions arising out of our moral nature, ought rather to receive the patronage, than encounter the vengeance, of an enlightened legislature. I would have you know, my Lord, that fetters of iron cannot bind or subdue the soul of virtue. From the damps and solitude of its dungeon, it ascends free and undaunted, whither thine, from the pompous seat of judgment, dare not soar. I do not warn you to beware lest your profession as a Christian should make you forget that you are a man ;—but I warn you against festinating that period, which, under the present coercive system, is too rapidly maturing, when the seats of justice shall be the seats of venality and slavishness and the cells of Newgate become the abode of all that is honourable and true."

The orthodox theory of punishment prevalent in his own age, could not satisfy Godwin. He could never accept the view that it signified infliction of pain upon a sentient creature not because the public advantage demands it but because suffering is a suitable concomitant of vice.* The fundamental principles of his philosophy militated against such a crude conception. Man, according to him, cannot be held responsible for his actions unless he is a free agent capable of consciously choosing his own course of life. The hypothesis of free-will is, therefore, the basis on which the popular doctrine of punishment is based. But is man really free? Assuredly *not* ; so asserted the Philosopher of Skinner Street with all the emphasis that he could command. This necessitarian standpoint strikes at the very root of moral responsibility and thereby changes the entire theory of punishment. If mind " be an agent in no other sense than matter is an agent ;" if man be a mere automaton governed, on all occasions of life, by motives and impulses, the justice of punishment which, in the strictest import of the term, can

* Godwin, Political Justice, VII, i.

only be " a deduction from freedom of will, must be false. There is therefore accurately speaking no *desert* " : it is at best, a chimerical property.*

The true criterion of punishment is, according to the Godwinian point of view, utility. We should not cause unnecessary suffering to man nor infiict any punishment unless it be to ensure the good of the community at large. " It is right," asserted Godwin," that I should inflict suffering in every case where it can be clearly shown that such infliction will produce an overbalance of good." Punishment, on this supposition has no reference to questions of innocence or guilt of the person on whom it is inflicted. Even " an innocent man is the proper subject of it if it tend to good. A guilty man is the proper subject of it under no other point of view." †

Equally conscious was Shelley of the implications of the necessitarian doctrines which he had, under the influence of his master, accepted. He knew that it " tends to introduce a great change into the established notions of morality." ‡ Like Godwin he was constrained to observe that " desert, in the present sense of the term would no longer have any meaning." In the poet's opinion a judge who, strictly conforming to the traditional conception of punishment, inflicts pain upon another for " no better reason than that he deserved it, simply gratifies his revenge under pretence of satisfying justice." There is, indeed, no justification whatsoever for the popular idea that a criminal should not only be prevented from a repetition of his crime but also feel pain in just proportion to his guilt. If morality has no meaning unless it contributes to the happiness of the community, the severe punishments which were in those days inflicted upon men in the name of justice could, in no sense, be regarded as moral ; for they never " augmented, even at(?) the long run, the stock of pleasurable sensations in the world." These doctrines, however, do not " in the least

* Godwin, Political Justice, VII, i.
† *Ibid.*
‡ Shelley, Notes on Queen Mab, VI, 198.

diminish our disapprobation of vice." "The conviction, which all feel that a viper is a poisonous animal and that a tiger is constrained, by the inevitable condition of his existence, to devour men, does not induce us to avoid them less sedulously or, even more, to hesitate in destroying them."*

In his Political Justice† Godwin examined very carefully the orthodox theories of punishment and sought to judge them according to standards of justice and equity. Punishment has often been regarded as absolutely necessary for the purpose of restraining people from the commission of crimes. This particular theory could not satisfy the analytical intellect of the utilitarian philosopher. Such an argument, he very significantly pointed out, has been, more often than not, utilised to "justify the most execrable of all tyrannies" rather than vindicate the true cause of human progress. "All coercion for the sake of restraint is," in Godwin's opinion, "a species of punishment the most abhorrent to reason and arbitrary in its application." Nor could he accept the theory of reformative punishment. The idea that punishment is inflicted with a view to reforming the criminal appeared to be absolutely baseless. Reason alone can convince man of the justice or injustice of his actions. If he does wrong "a very simple statement, flowing from a clear and comprehensive view will make it appear to be such;" and so powerful is reason, so omnipotent its appeal that none, however pernicious his nature may be, can resist the evidence of truth. Punishment, on the contrary, "cannot convince," nor is it able to conciliate; it rather alienates the mind of those on whom it is inflicted. "The last object that coercion purposes is *example*." But this object, Godwin asserted with all the emphasis he could command, instead of contributing to the welfare of society brutalises it. The very idea of making an example of a person degenerates not only the judge who inflicts and the criminal who suffers the punishment but the virus spreads over the entire community. Revenge takes the place of justice and cruelty seeks out new methods of torture.

* Shelley, Notes on Queen Mab. VI, 198.
† Godwin, Political Justice, VII, iii.

Barbarous details are heaped together to render such spectacles more impressive and horrible. In course of time, however, the very refinements of cruelty which, when new, had made a profound impression on the mind of on-lookers gradually lose their terrors. Only the injustice and tyranny of the entire procedure become exposed to our view. People soon begin to murmur against the inequitous system prevalent in society. Such anger as the members of the community then feel can never be fully allayed; " barbarity possesses none of the attributes of persuasion; it may terrify indeed, but it cannot produce candour and docility." Moreover coercion or punishment of this type suppresses all intellectual efforts and sets a premium on mechanical obedience. People are asked to follow a course of action not because it is reasonable but because " such is the good pleasure of our superiors and because, as we are taught by the example in question, they will make us rue our stubbornness if we think otherwise." Most unjust of all, according to Godwin, is the punishment of death. It is unnecessary because there are many other ways of reforming the criminal if not of preventing the crime. It is unjust because it " puts a perpetual close " upon his life, depriving him for ever of " all the enjoyments, the virtues and the excellences of a human being." The criminal, according to him, stands most in need of the assistance of his fellow-beings. " If they treated him all with kindness instead of supercilious and unfeeling neglect, if they made him understand with how much reluctance they had been induced to employ the force of the society against him, if they had presented truth to his mind with calmness, perspicuity and benevolence, if they employed those precautions which an humane disposition would not fail to suggest, to keep from him the motives of corruption and obstinacy his reformation would be almost infallible. These are the prospects to which his wants and his misfortunes powerfully entitle him; and it is from these prospects that the hand of the executioner cuts him off for ever." *

* Godwin, Political Justice, VII, vi.

Like his master Godwin, Shelley was fully conscious of the defects of the popular conception of punishment. He was careful to point out that Government, in every age and in every country, has failed to base its legislative acts on proper foundations. Revenge, retaliation, atonement and expiation which are " the chief sources of a prodigious class of miseries in the domestic circles of society " have not been properly considered. Instead of framing its institutions on more philosophical principles, it has, so far as the administration of criminal justice is concerned, sought to steer a middle course and consequently ignored the just criterion of punishment which is utility. The poet accepted without question the Godwinian doctrine that the highest conception of punishment consists in " the inflicting of no evil on a sensitive being, without a decisively beneficial result in which the criminal himself should, at least, participate;" and further that its lowest ideal is the popular conception of retributive justice. Modern legislation is a compromise between these two positions and, as such, does not satisfy the rational standards of equity.*

Equally emphatic was Shelley in his condemnation of the punishment of death. Like Godwin, he was fully convinced of the absolute injustice which underlies such inflictions. " To compel a person to know all that can be known by the dead, concerning which the living hope, fear and forget; to plunge him into the pleasure or pain which there awaits him; to punish or reward him in a manner and in a degree incalculable and incomprehensible to us; to dissolve him at once from all the inter-texture of good and evil with which nature seems to have clothed every form of individual existence"—this, according to Shelley, is the punishment of death. It must be noted, however, that the arguments of Shelley on this question differ widely from those of Godwin. Unlike the philosopher, the poet condemned the punishment of death not because it prevented the reform and self-examination of the criminal but because it, all at once, without any

* Shelley, On the Punishment of Death.

previous preparation, brought man face to face with the eternal enigma of a future life. His condemnation was more inspired by idealistic considerations than Godwin's.

To the poetic mind of Shelley the punishment of death was a question of supreme importance. It was the theme round which were concentrated all his criticisms of the prevailing ideas regarding justice and the administration of penal laws. Punishments like that of death are, according to him, " singularly inadequate to intimidate " the general public " from incurring a similar liability." * Persons who suffer death often show such fortitude that people are more inspired with pity than terror. They do not depart with " a panic-striken approbation " of the laws which inflict such a penalty. On the contrary the laws lose their prestige ; they can, no longer command that " sympathy which," as Godwin very pertinently observed, " ought to be their chief object to secure and in the participation of which consists their chief strength." † The very sight of suffering endured with patience, courage and proud resignation leaves an indelible impression on the common people. They lose sight of the " motives which incited the criminals to the actions for which they suffer " or of the effects, though " eminently pernicious," of their crimes. They only remember with surprise and admiration " the heroic courage " with which the punishment is faced. Thus the main object of such penalties is frustrated.‡ There are, in these arguments of Shelley, not the slightest hint that he had ever taken into account the indignation which, according to Godwin, such barbarous punishment openly inflicted rouses in the mind of the onlookers ; nor did he try, like his master, to form a just estimate of the evil effects of such an indignation. He seemed also to be absolutely oblivious of the mechanical obedience as opposed to rational submission which such punishments involve. He ignored entirely these primary considerations which are the very basis of Godwin's objection to the popular theories of punishment.

*—‡ Shelley, On the Punishment of Death.

The poet was, however, fully aware that the penalties of this type rouse the baser passions of men. He significantly pointed out that " in those whom this exhibition does not awaken to the sympathy which extenuates crime and discredits the law which restrains it, produces feelings more directly at war with the genuine purposes of political society." *

Again :

" It excites those emotions which it is the chief object of civilisation to extinguish for ever, and in the extinction of which alone there can be any hope of better institutions." † Men become revengeful ; they connect their own welfare with the sufferings and even the death of their fellow-beings. In the earlier stages of civilisation when the members of a particular community were not disciplined by any organised form of government, revenge was one of the securities that injuries of a similar nature would not be repeated. In the civilised state, Shelley asserted, the laws founded on reason should accustom the vulgar "to associate their ideas of security and of interest with the reformation and the strict restraint, for that purpose alone, of those who might invade it." ‡ The administration of criminal law in the days of Shelley did, on the contrary, only rouse the passion of revenge in the minds of men; so much so that " this feeling engrafted upon superstition and confirmed by habit at last lost sight of the only object for which it might be supposed to have been implanted and became a passion and a duty to be pursued and fulfilled even to the destruction of those ends to which it was originally intended ;" § and we can discern the true ring of Godwinian principles when the poet concluded that punishment is justifiable only in so far as it is necessary for " the reformation and restraint of those who transgress the law ;" ‖ otherwise it confirms all the inhuman and anti-social impulses of man.

*—‖ Shelley, On the Punishment of Death.

On the general question of government again, we can distinctly trace in the poet's ideas the influence of Godwinian theories. Government by itself is *an evil;* " it is only the thoughtlessness and vices of men that make it a *necessary* evil." Let men be but honest and virtuous, and government will, in the very nature of things, gradually decay and ultimately disappear. Virtue and wisdom enable man to develop his personality without any incentive from outside. He proceeds from an impulse of his own nature and fulfils an inner craving of his own soul. Government, which had, before, been a safeguard, now becomes a tyranny. Restraint merely impedes human progress. Yet government, in the present state of society, is necessary. Like Godwin, Shelley was conscious of the defects of the human nature; like him too, the poet was convinced that " so long as men continue foolish and vicious, so long will government, even such a government as that of England, continue necessary in order to prevent the crimes of bad men;"* and he almost echoed his master when he said that " society is produced by the wants and government by the wickedness of man."† Man must reform himself first before he ventures to abolish or even change his government. He must become an ideally perfect being, before he can hope for a strictly individualistic form of society. Then alone will humanity be redeemed; then alone will virtue and wisdom conquer pain and vice. " No government will then be wanted but that of our neighbour's opinions."‡

Shelley, however, gave us no clear idea of his views regarding the ideal form of society. In Godwin, we have some glimpses at least of small parish states where opinion, rather than the fear of punishment, is supreme. But in the prose works of Shelley even such glimpses are denied us. The poet, in this respect, appears to be more thoroughgoing in his individualism than the philosopher. The individual is the centre of his speculations; and government, associations, all recede into the background. The state is for the individual and not

*—‡ Shelley, Address to the Irish People.

the individual for the state. " Government has no rights; it is a delegation of several individuals for the purpose of securing their own. It is, therefore, just only so far as it exists by their consent, useful only so far as it operates to their well-being." *

The same idea permeates his poetical works from the *Queen Mab* to the *Prometheus Unbound*. The morning of love dawns slowly over the happy earth, the reality of heaven. Crime which had so long careered " unblushing and undisguising, bold and strong," and triumphed over all hopes; Falsehood which " tricked in virtue's attributes," had long "sanctified deeds of vice and woe";—all vanish before the appearance of reason like mist before the sunrise. Avarice, cunning and pride no longer stamp

> " The seal of gray deformity
> On all the mingling lineaments of time."

The moral world is completely freed from the fetters of tyrannic law; and the brand of God is effaced from the universe. The proud monarch's palace which had, "through distant ages, long in pride," mocked " the faint groan of famine and the silent tear of penury" lies mouldering in ruins, a terrible warning to Despotism. Religion loses its withering influence and the works of faith and slavery perish miserably never to rise again.† Thus did Shelley sing—in triumphant faith—the dirge of political institutions.

He could not, however, give his readers equally definite ideas about the future state-organisation through which humanity fulfils itself. He spoke, indeed, of " meek-eyed courage," " the elevated will," " virtue, love and pleasure," which men, as individual beings, attain.‡ But how they organise themselves into communities or whether they organise themselves at all, are questions which he left

* Shelley, Declaration of Rights.
† and ‡ Queen Mab, IX, ll. 45-135.

unanswered. On the contrary, Government, in his opinion, tends to repress the individual by imposing on him " an outward authority more important than his own secret conscience." The citizen becomes, to all intents and purposes, mere property of the state. Thus the many "are immolated to the few." Men gradually succumb to the pressure of the government; they grow reconciled to their fate and even come to believe that their subservient position is their ultimate destiny. " These views," observed Shelley, " cannot be too earnestly withstood; nothing seems to one so needful as to give to the mind, the consciousness.....of its own separate worth. Let the individual feel that he is placed in the community not to part with his individuality, or to become a tool. To me the progress of society consists in nothing more than in bringing out the individual, in giving him a consciousness of his own being and in quickening him to strengthen and elevate his own mind."* The future state of man, whether on earth or in heaven, is thus purely individualistic in nature. Individuality, in fact, had now for Shelley a far greater significance than before. It was " moral self-subsistence," " the secret foundation of an all-comprehending love." No man " so multiplies his bonds with his community as he who watches over his own perfection." The poet was now conscious of a beautiful harmony between "the good of the state " on the one hand and " the moral freedom and dignity of the individual " on the other. When there was a clash between the two he was not afraid to enjoin disobedience to the laws of the state. Property or life a man " can joyfully surrender to the state but his soul he should never stain or enslave." For an individualist of this type it was not at all impossible to conceive of man as a Being entirely free from such subversive bondage as that of the state or the community. The Millennium that the poet frequently pictured in his imagination was, in every case, of this individualistic nature. Laon and Cythna, for instance, die on

* Shelley, Letter (Aug. 17, 1812).

the pyre erected by fanatism and they are, all at once, transported to a region of perfect loveliness, seated

> " .....on the waved and golden sand
> Of a clear pool, upon a bank o'ertwined
> With strange and star-bright flowers, which to the wind
> Breathed divine odour; high above, was spread
> The enamelled heaven of trees of unknown kind,
> Whose moon-like blooms and bright fruit overlaid
> A shadow, which was light, upon the water's shade " *

—a scene of pastoral innocence, untroubled by thoughts or aspirations.

In the *Prometheus Unbound* Shelley painted a similar picture of the abolition of political institutions. Man is redeemed; and behold! " thrones are kingless and men walk one with other even as spirits do;" hate, disdain, fear, self-love and self-contempt no more crush out hope from the human heart.† "Thrones, altars, judgment-seats and prisons," " tomes of reasoned wrong, glozed on by ignorance " and " those foul shapes abhorred by God and man, strange, savage, ghostly, dark, execrable " which the panic-stricken nations had, so long, worshipped with hecatombs of blood, now moulder fast in their abandoned shrines.‡ The loathsome mask of hypocrisy and cant falls away from the face of things‡ and Man remains

> " Scepterless, free, uncircumscribed, but man
> Equal, unclassed, tribeless and nationless,
> Exempt from awe, worship, degree, the king
> Over himself, just, gentle, wise; but man." §

But humanity, when saved, no more lives in the active world of realisation. Man retires to a pastoral life of prettiness and

* Revolt of Islam, XII, xviii.
† Prometheus Unbound, Act III, Sc. IV, ll. 439-445.
‡ *Ibid.*, Act III, Sc. IV, ll. 488 *et seq.*
§ *Ibid.*, Act III, Sc. IV, ll. 490-500, 501-4.

ease. There, he lives in a cave, overgrown with trailing odorous plants and paved with veined emerald; sitting and talking

> " .....of time and change
> As the world ebbs and flows."*

" We will," says Prometheus,

> " We will entangle buds and flowers and beams
> Which twinkle on the fountain's brim and make
> Strange combinations out of common things." †

or else

> " .....search, with looks and words of love
> For hidden thoughts, each lovelier than the last,
> Our unexhausted spirit.‡

or " weave harmonies out of impressions received from the outside world." He leads a life of self-isolation, completely separated from his fellow-creatures, catching occasionally, in the midst of his earthly paradise of bucolic ease, dim and indefinite echoes of the human world,

> " .....which tell
> Of the low voice of love, almost unheard
> And dove-eyed pity's murmured pain and music
> Itself the echo of the heart, and all
> That tempers or improves man's life now free." §

Man's universe is now populated not by his ' brither man,' painfully struggling for redemption, but by visions and bright forms created by his own imagination—

> " .....the progeny immortal
> Of painting, sculpture and rapt poesy
> And arts, tho' unimagined, yet to be." ‖

* Prometheus Unbound, Act III, Sc. IV, ll. 150-160.
† *Ibid.*, ll. 162-164.
‡ *Ibid.*, ll. 168-70.
§ *Ibid.*, Act III, Sc. IV, ll. 177-81.
‖ *Ibid.*, ll. 187-89.

In this world of visions and shadowy creations, Shelley always lived and it is, therefore, only natural that we should not be able to discern in his poetry any clear idea as to the forms of human communities in the future.

Such vagueness of thought was mainly due to the atmosphere of revolutionary ideas in the midst of which Shelley lived. Embittered by the political inequalities, social injustice and religious intolerance prevalent in their day, the philosophers and thinkers of the French Revolution denounced Society altogether. " The sum of woes of the human race was not diminished...on the contrary, it was increased by its religion, its government, its opinions, in a word, by all institutions which it was led to adopt on the plea of ameliorating its lot."* Once these tyrannical organisations are destroyed, and their blighting influence removed, the innate nobility of man will, at once, reassert itself and redeem mankind. Salvation, according to these apostles of ' equality, fraternity, and liberty,' could be obtained not by a slow and gradual process of development, but by a sudden overthrow of tyranny. The modern scientific theories of law and evolution had not, as yet, been discovered and the thinkers of that age could not conceive of Society as proceeding slowly along a path of systematic progress towards a distant goal of perfection. On the contrary, the complexities of life in modern society, its luxury and dilettantism, its corruptions, both aesthetic and moral, made them turn away from culture and civilisation altogether. They contrasted the Society of their own age and its corruptions with " the picture of simplicity which prevailed in the earliest times." "The greater part of our ills are of our own making and we might have avoided them nearly all by adhering to that *simple, uniform and solitary* manner of life which nature prescribed." † Their ideal state, whenever attained, was, consequently, 'one of stagnant and empty enjoyment ' rather than of continual advance through struggle. " The Happy Savage " (of Rousseau) wanders up and down

* D'Holbach, System de la Nature.
† Rousseau, A Discourse on the Arts and the Sciences.

the forests, "keeping a just mean between the indolence of the primitive man and the petulant activities of our own egoism."* He leads a life of ease and innocence.

The logical mind of Godwin could not rest satisfied with the vague speculations of these philosophers but the imaginative temperament of Shelley was immediately fascinated by their dreams. Godwin carried his theories to their logical conclusion and admitted the necessity of states, however small or parochial they might be. Shelley had, however, no firm grip on the concrete realities of human life and accepted with the enthusiasm of a convert their beautiful visions, creating out of them his own world of vague spiritual beings—a world, invertebrate and weak, of pastoral ease and luscious sentimentality. Man breaks away from the fetters of custom only to enmesh himself in the more alluring toils of sloth and indolence. In fact, the immaturity of Shelley's intellect, already discernible in the unassimilated ideas and ill-assorted dogmas of his earlier poetry becomes all the more prominent in his speculations on the future society of man.

Godwin was a thoroughgoing Utilitarian. Public good, according to him, was the only criterion for judging laws and institutions. Politics cannot be divorced from morality. At least Godwin could not accept any definition of the ethical science which loses sight of this most significant aspect. Ethics should never confine itself merely to a consideration of the petty details of private life, ignoring altogether the close relationship which an individual bears to society; and political regulations should, without any exception, be regarded as parts of moral law. Virtue, both public and private, should proceed from kind and benevolent intentions and contribute to the general happiness; while duty should consist in the "best possible application to the general benefit."† Man is, however, greatly hampered by the existence

* Rousseau, On Inequality.
† Godwin, Political Justice, II, iv.

of arbitrary distinctions in Society and its tendency to coerce individual opinion into compliance with its conventional ideals. He cannot fully exercise his virtues; nor can he participate in the work of furthering the welfare of the community at large. For the regeneration of society and the redemption of man all such meaningless distinctions must be swept away; and organisations which thwart the free exercise of human virtues should be ruthlessly destroyed.

No less strong was Shelley in his insistence on the close association between politics and morality: and he could not understand how and on what principles people could differentiate between individual action and corporate activities, holding the former as within, and the latter as outside, the sphere of ethical judgments. Like Godwin, he considered it absolutely necessary that the old distinction between moral and political virtues should disappear once for all. "Southey says," wrote Shelley to Elizabeth Hitchener, "Expediency ought to be made the ground of politics but not of morals. I urged that the most fatal error that ever happened in the world was the separation of the political and the ethical sciences; that the former ought to be entirely regulated by the latter as whatever was a right criterion of action for an individual, must be for a society which was but an assemblage of individuals; that 'Politics were morals more comprehensibly enforced.'"*

It was, consequently, the poet's earnest desire to see ideals of morality firmly established in all departments of life. The foundations of morality, Shelley, fresh from his study of 'Political Justice,' could not but lay upon considerations of public utility. He desired to "establish, on a lasting basis, the happiness of mankind."† This was the standard according to which he judged his own actions as well as those of his contemporaries. Once convinced of the justice of his own conduct, nobody, not even Godwin himself, could make him

* and † Shelley, Letter to Eliz. Hitchener (June 7, 1812).

give up the course of action he was pursuing. Godwin protested against his proposal for " An Association of Philanthropists for Ireland." " A preponderance of resulting good," remonstrated the poet in reply, " is imagined in every action. I certainly believe that the line of conduct I am now pursuing will produce a preponderance of good; when I get rid of that conviction my conduct will be changed." *

Utility thenceforward became the standard by which the poet judged not only individual actions but corporate activities as well. An action is virtuous or moral only when " considered in all its accessories and consequences, it is fitted to produce the highest pleasure to the greatest number of sentient beings."† Society itself has for its object the happiness of its constituent parts—the individuals who compose the community. Its forms are perfect or imperfect "in proportion to the degree in which they promote this end."‡ Like Godwin, Shelley protested against the inequitable system prevalent in his own age. " It is not enough that one person or class of persons should enjoy the highest happiness while another is suffering a disproportionate degree of misery." § Like Godwin again, he held that human institutions should be thoroughly reconstructed and "the happiness produced by common efforts and preserved by the common care should be distributed according to the just claims of each individual."‖ For, the main principle underlying all human organisations " is not merely the quantity of happiness enjoyed by individuals but the mode in which it might be broadcasted." ¶ The poet's ideals of justice and virtue are also considerably influenced by the speculations of his master. Virtue is the disposition of an individual towards "generating or diffusing happiness;"** while benevolence and justice—two principles which, according to Shelley, constitute virtue—have, for their basis, the same considerations of utility or the general

* Shelley, Letter to Godwin.
†—¶ Shelley, Speculations on Morals: Introduction.
** *Ibid.*, Chapter I.

happiness. They have always an unmistakable Godwinian ring about them. Benevolence (as in Godwin) is the "desire to be the author of good" and Justice means "an apprehension of the manner in which that good is to be done." *

As the poet proceeded to develop his theories, the implications of Utilitarianism were gradually revealed to his understanding. Like Mill, he soon came to differentiate not only between the degrees of pleasure and utility but between their types as well. Pleasure or good, in a general sense, means "that which a sensitive and intelligent being seeks." † It is of two different kinds—"one durable, universal and permanent; the other, transitory and particular."‡ Utility "may either express the means of producing the former or the latter." § The general body of utilitarian philosophers are often tempted to accept the narrower sense of the term and seem to identify their moral principle with what "banishes the importunity of the wants of our animal nature, the surrounding men with security of life, the dispersing of the grosser delusions of superstition, and the conciliating such a degree of mutual forbearance among them as may consist with the motives of personal advantage."‖ Shelley recognised the service which thinkers and reformers of this type render to society. In the economy of life they have their particular place and their appointed office. Their efforts for the reformation of society and the regeneration of man are of the highest value to humanity. Only, they should confine themselves and "their administration of the concerns of the inferior powers of our nature within the limits due to the superior ones."¶ Else, their principles, adequate in their proper element, will lead them into bewildering complications, when applied to questions lying beyond their province. Their ideals, totally divorced, as they are, from "the first principles which belong to the imagination," will, instead of reforming society and the state, assuredly drive them between the Scylla and Charybdis

* Shelley, Speculations on Morals, Chapter I.
†—¶ Shelley, Defence of Poetry.

of anarchy, on the one hand, and despotism, on the other. Shelley was not blind to the pernicious effects of "an unmitigated exercise of the calculating faculty."* He fully recognised its benumbing influence which stifles the generous impulses of the human heart; and turned aside with disgust from this narrow interpretation of utility to its broader significance. "Whatever strengthens and purifies the affections, enlarges the imagination and adds spirit to the sense *is useful*."† This is the higher type which appealed to the imaginative temperament of the poet and here he parted company with his master, Godwin.

Shelley thus gradually approached the idealistic standpoint of view in his ethical theories. Yet he was always conscious of the intimate relationship between Politics and morality. In his early youth he had proclaimed in unmistakable terms that "Expediency is inadmissible in morals; Politics are only sound when conducted on the principles of morality; they are, in fact, the morals of a nation."‡ Again: "Law cannot make what is, in its nature, virtuous or innocent, to be criminal, any more than it can make what is criminal, to be innocent. Government cannot make a law; it can only pronounce that which was the law before its organisation; namely, the moral result of the imperishable relation of things."§ He had appealed to his Irish compatriots "never to transgress the rules of virtue and justice; for liberty and happiness are founded upon virtue and justice; if you destroy the one you destroy the other;"‖ and throughout his life, not for a single moment, did this much-maligned man deviate, for even an inch, from the path he had thus chalked out for himself. In fact, one of the inestimable services which this youthful poet rendered to the society which had spurned him was, to lead politics back from the "serbonian bog" of expediency to the haven of morality.

The whole atmosphere of his poetry is surcharged with the highest ethical principles, principles which, though

* and † Shelley, Defence of Poetry.
‡ and § Shelley, Declaration of Rights.
‖ Shelley, Address to the Irish People.

they apparently went against the accepted conventions of society, were, nevertheless, true, because they conformed to the ideals of truth and beauty which are enshrined in the hearts of all individual men. The emotions which palpitate through the *Revolt of Islam* or the *Prometheus Unbound*, revealed to his age a new world of moral ideals—a world of Justice and Benevolence, of virtuous enthusiasm and ardent faith. The righteous indignation that Shelley felt for the injustices and inequalities of modern civilisation and the resentment he so emphatically expressed in glowing passages both of his early poems like *Queen Mab* or the *Revolt of Islam* and his maturer works like the *Prometheus Unbound*, are not the effects of a mere pose but real and sincere, wrung painfully from the anguish of a poet's heart. No less lofty are the ideals he promulgated in his matchless verse—

> " To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;
> To forgive wrongs darker than death or night;
> To defy power, which seems omnipotent;
> To love and bear; to hope till Hope creates
> From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;
> Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent;
> This like thy glory, Titan, is to be
> Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;
> This is alone life, joy, empire, and victory."*

Or is there a greater message of hope and a higher conception of the human personality than the following?—

> " Man, one harmonious soul of many a soul,
> Whose nature is its own divine control,
> Where all things flow to all, as rivers to the sea;"

his familiar acts are beautiful through love and

> " His will, with all mean passions, bad delights,
> And selfish cares, its trembling satellites

* Prometheus Unbound, Act IV, ll. 570-78.

A spirit ill to guide, but mighty to obey,
Is as a tempest-winged ship whose helm
Love rules, through waves which dare not overwhelm
Forcing life's wildest shores to own its sovereign sway."*

This is Shelley, not surely "an ineffectual Angel beating the void with its luminous wings" but a potent spirit to raise and uplift the soul of man if he will but listen.†

Godwin was firmly convinced that human nature is capable of unlimited improvement and set aside as untenable theories which militated against this view. In the choice of alternatives, his sovereign faith in human perfectibility always guided him. Free-will seemed to go against his cherished aspirations; *ergo*, it must be disproved and Necessity established in its place. "Man being a creature whose actions flow from the simplest principle, and who is governed by the apprehensions of his understanding, nothing further is requisite, but the improvement of his understanding to make him virtuous and happy;"‡ and Godwin proceeded, therefore, to prove that "if we form a just and complete view of all the circumstances in which a living or intelligent being is placed, we shall find that he could not, in any moment of his existence, have acted otherwise than he did."§ The doctrine of Necessity, Godwin pointed out, is the basis of all attempts to evolve a science out of the multiplied phenomena of the mind. "How can we discover any general principles of Psychology or make intellect a topic of science unless mind, like matter, exhibits a constant conjunction of events, and affords a reasonable presumption to the necessary connection of those events?"‖ Moreover there can be no such thing as character at all unless it is possible to establish an essential connection between motives and

* Prometheus Unbound, Act IV, ll. 400 *et seq.*

† In "A Philosophical View of Reform" however he seems to accept the orthodox standpoint regarding expediency and politics.

‡ and § Godwin, Political Justice, I, v.

‖ *Ibid.*, IV, vii.

actions.* If man possesses " a faculty independent of his understanding and capable, from mere caprice, to resist the most powerful arguments, the best education and the most sedulous instruction might be of no use to him."† Such a freedom of will is, at best, a delusion and a snare; it is "man's bane and curse." The virtuous man "in proportion to his improvements, will, consequently, be under the influence of fixed and invariable principles."‡

There was, in the personality of Shelley, a curious intermingling of contradictory elements. Though an ardent follower of the revolutionary school, his mind could not rest satisfied with its materialistic outlook on life, and he, throughout his poetical career, hankered for a belief in an all-pervasive spirit behind the universe. God may be a vague word, " the source of numberless errors;" and as such it may deserve to be " erased from the nomenclature of philosophy;" yet it is impossible not to believe in a " soul of the universe, an intelligent and *necessarily* beneficent, actuating principle." For the leaf of a tree " the meanest insect on which we trample, are, in themselves, arguments more conclusive than any which can be advanced that *some vast Intellect animates Infinity*."§ The poet could never conceive of the universe as a mere conglomeration of atoms without any spark of intelligence to illuminate it; his mind was too much influenced by his idealistic temperament to do so.

But this Spirit of Nature is very hazy in its outlines. Sometimes it is Intellect (*cf.* the passage quoted above); on other occasions, it is " the spirit of universal, imperishable love."‖ Nature, Man, Society—all are parts of this stupendous whole, harmoniously blended together into one complex unity. The conception of necessity was, however, during the early period of Shelley's life, hardly discernible in his speculations. In his letters belonging to this period, man is a free

* Godwin, Political Justice, IV. vii.
† and ‡ *Ibid.*
§ Shelley, Letter to Hogg (Jan. 3, 1811).
‖ *Ibid.* (Jan. 12, 1811).

agent, responsible for his own conduct, liable to punishments or deserving of rewards in strict accordance with the characteristic actions of his life. In explaining to his friends and acquaintances, his activities, the poet never represented himself and his associates as " mere vehicles or instruments " through which the one Universal Spirit of Nature works. Man has a personality of his own—a personality which he can, and therefore ought to, develop by an absolutely free exercise of his faculties. We discern the same tendency in his prose works as well. " Moral science.....is the doctrine of the voluntary actions of man,"* and we become cognisant of the existence of other minds only when we are conscious of " a periodical recurrence of masses of ideas which *our voluntary determinations* have, in one peculiar direction, no power to circumscribe or arrest."† The whole basis, therefore, of our knowledge of not-self lies in this limit set to *our* ' voluntary determinations ' which must, otherwise, be free.

Yet from the earliest years of his life the poet was profoundly impressed by the unity of nature. Analogy and reason seemed to convince him that life is infinite; this universe is a " mass of infinite intelligence " animated by the soul—a " vivifying principle " not only of the " lowest link in the chain of existence " but also of the highest. It is an " immeasurable whole " of which individuals are mere constituent parts.‡ This conviction grew stronger in course of time and by 1814, the year in which *Queen Mab* was published, Shelley was fully converted to the Necessitarian doctrines of his master. Godwin had written in his Political Justice—" He who affirms that all actions are necessary means that, if we form a just and complete view of the circumstances in which a living or intelligent being is placed, we shall find that he could not, at any moment of his existence, have acted otherwise than he has acted." The universe is " connected

* Shelley, Speculations on Morals.
† Shelley, Speculations on Metaphysics.
‡ Shelley, Letter to Eliz. Hitchener (Jan. 2, 1812).

and cemented in all its parts; nothing in the boundless progress of things being capable of happening otherwise than it has actually happened." Human life and the human mind are not conglomerations of chance-connected elements. On the contrary, " in the life of every human being, there is a chain of causes—generated in that eternity which preceded his birth, and going on, in regular procession, through the whole period of his existence, in consequence of which it was impossible for him to act, in any instance, otherwise than he has acted." In the notes to *Queen Mab*,* Shelley echoed the same ideas and the same sentiments. " He who asserts the doctrine of necessity means that, contemplating the events which compose the moral and the material universe, he beholds only an immense and uninterrupted chain of causes and effects, no one of which could occupy any other place than it does occupy or act in any other way than it does act." The universe is a well-ordered system in which each individual element occupies a distinct place and performs a distinct function. Accident and chance can have no existence; they are ephemeral; mere effects of ignorance. Nature is uniform in her operations; causes and effects, antecedents and consequents, are all " necessarily " connected.

From a superficial enquiry it might appear that Necessity does not exert any influence on the human mind. Man observing his own mental activities may, at first sight, find no " connection between motive and action." Yet like his preceptor Godwin, Shelley was fully aware that " were the doctrine of Necessity false, the human mind would, no longer, be a legitimate object of science."† Our knowledge of Psychology will not be precise and definite, but vague and indeterminate. Moreover the most probable inducements and the clearest reasonings will lose the invariable influence they possess and, consequently, all efforts for the redemption of man through the enlightenment of the human intellect will be frustrated. Like Godwin, therefore, Shelley, in phrases strongly reminiscent of *Political Justice*, affirmed—" Every

* and † Shelley, Note on Queen Mab, VI, 196.

human being is irresistibly impelled to act precisely as he does act; *in the eternity which preceded his birth* a chain of causes was generated, which, operating under the name of motives, makes it impossible that any thought of his mind, or any action of his life should be otherwise than what it is."* Hence a science of Psychology is possible; we can not only know the nature and characteristics of our mental activities as they are, but can, after due consideration of the materials placed before us, infer our future course of action as well.† "The precise character and motives of any man on any occasion being given, the moral philosopher can predict his actions with as much certainty as the natural philosopher can predict the effects of the mixture of any particular chemical substances."‡

Relying fully upon the invariable and essential connection between motive and action, we can, according to Shelley, use the knowledge thus gained for furthering the cause of humanity. We may so transform the environments in the midst of which men live as to exert a compelling influence on their mind. We may strengthen in them those motives which make for progress. Such motives, thus strengthened, become invincible; men cannot resist them even as they cannot resist or overcome a physical impossibility. Impelled as human beings always are by the strongest motive in their mind, they will, under these circumstances, become powerful instruments in the cause of the redemption of man and the regeneration of human society. In fact, progress and reform is possible only if Necessity governs the universe both of mind and of matter as well. Then alone will it be possible for reformers to produce "beneficent moral effects by the application of moral causes which experience has shown to be effectual." §

*—‡ Shelley, Note on Queen Mab, VI, 198.

§ Shelley, Note on Queen Mab, VI, 198. In his later writings, however, the poet seems to have freed himself from the trammels of determinism. In Julian and Maddalo, for instance he points out that

".....It is our will
That thus enchains us to permitted ill.
We might be otherwise—we might be all
We dream of, happy, high and Majestical.

Shelley was not, however, ignorant of the far-reaching consequences of Necessitarianism. He himself admitted that it "tends to introduce a great change into the established notions of morality and utterly destroy religion."* Reward and punishment lose their accepted significance and acquiring a Godwinian implication become mere instruments for the furtherance of his cause—motives whereby he can "procure the adoption or the abandonment of any given line of action." Moreover the Necessitarian is the ideal man of Godwin—Intellect personified, enlightened by experience and untainted by feelings and impulses. He does not gratify his revenge under the pretence of satisfying justice; he does not indulge in hatred or contempt. "Cowardice, curiosity, and inconsistency"—three evils, according to Shelley—do not assail him; he has risen superior to the delusions of free-will and "looks with an elevated and dreadless composure upon the links of the universal chain as they pass before his eyes." †

Necessity influences theology no less than morality. Will is only a mode of the human mind; moral qualities are such as only human beings can possess; to attribute them to the principle of the universe is "to annex to it, properties incompatible with any possible definition of its nature."‡ The Eternal Spirit thus becomes impersonal; it is stripped of all its anthropomorphic attributes and no possible relationship can ever be established between itself and the human mind. God is "only an expression denoting the unknown cause of the known events which men perceive in the universe." § In course of time common people mistake this metaphor for a real person and endow this word with human qualities. If, however, this all-pervasive principle be not an organic being, there can be no communion between itself and man, so that religion, which is only a "perception of the relation in which we stand to the principle of the universe" ‖ becomes nugatory and vain.

"There is no God, no *creative deity*;" but "the hypothesis of a pervading spirit co-eternal with the world remains

*—‖ Shelley, Note on Queen Mab, VI, 198.

unshaken."* It is Necessity, the " mother of the world "† a spirit which is the

" Life of the interminable multitudes."

It is equally the

" Soul of those mighty spheres
Whose changeless paths through Heaven's deep silence lie;"

and the

" Soul of the smallest being
The dwelling of whose life
Is one faint April sun-gleam." ‡

The different objects of nature, everything that this wide world contains, its powers, both spiritual and material, are the passive instruments of the " all-pervading principle, co-eternal with the universe." § Even Man himself with his vaunted worth and prowess is a mere agent fulfilling, unconsciously, its fixed and immutable laws.‖ Human passions and prejudices, the thoughts, fancies and imaginations of men are nothing but

" .....a link
In the great chain of Nature."¶

Man, Nature, and the entire Universe from the great planets that wheel in their own particular orbits to the smallest motes which people the sunbeams—all thus become parts of one

* Shelley, Note on " There is no God," Queen Mab, VII, 13.
† Queen Mab, VI, 198.
‡ *Cf. Ibid.*, III, 226-232.
§ *Cf. Ibid.*, VI, 214-19.
‖ *Ibid.*, III, 234, II, 238-48.
¶ *Ibid.*, II, 106-07.

stupendous whole; each has its distinct place to occupy and its distinct function to perform, so that, no atom

> " .....fulfils
> A vague or *unnecessitated* task,
> Or acts but as it must and ought to act."*

True to his theory that ' the unknown Cause of the known events which men perceive in the universe ' cannot be an organic being possessing moral qualities and human attributes, Shelley represented this Spirit of Nature as perfectly non-human. It regards all its agents with an impartial eye and has neither " human sense " nor " the human mind."† " The caprice," said the poet,

> " The caprice
> Of man's weak will belongs no more to thee
> Than do the changeful passions of his heart
> To thy unvarying harmany."‡

There may be and there are ' from the depth of ages old ' two powers who

> " .....o'er mortal things dominion hold
> Ruling the world with divided lot
> Immortal, all-pervading, manifold "§

two spirits, good and evil, struggling for mastery from eternity. Yet they have no ultimate authority of their own; they are themselves the two different aspects of the one great power far superior to them—

> " .....One comes behind
> Who aye the future to the past will bind,—
> *Necessity*, whose *sightless strength* for ever
> Evil with evil, good with good, must wind
> In bands of union which no power may sever:" ‖

* Queen Mab, VI, 171-73.
† *Ibid.*, VI, 218-19.
‡ *Ibid.*, VI, 200-203.
§ Revolt of Islam, I, xxv.
‖ *Ibid.*, VI, 218-19.

Sightless strength—that is the real character of Necessity which both Godwin and Shelley celebrated. It is not creative; but a principle which is immanent in the world and exists in it from eternity.

Yet even in *Queen Mab*, Shelley differed from the standpoint of view adopted by Godwin in very important aspects. The philosophical theory of Godwin sought to explain the constitution of the universe. He did not go farther and create a Spirit out of his philosophical doctrines. He did not invest his ideas with personality. Shelley himself had warned his fellow-men against the vulgar mistake of taking a word or an idea for a real person;* man should not create his God in his own image and after his likeness. But the poet violated his own principles when in *Queen Mab* he transformed the Theory of Necessity into a vast and all-pervading Spirit, thus investing an idea with personality however slight that might be. Once he did so, he could, no longer, stick to his original conception of a passive deity. Necessity is, no longer, a principle of "sightless strength," it is "active, steadfast and eternal." † It presides

> ".....in the storm of change that ceaselessly
> Rolls round the eternal universe and shakes
> Its undecaying battlements" ‡

and guides its manifold activities. If necessary it can blot out "with re-creating hand the blood-stained charter of all woe from the book of the earth." §

The original concept of a blind inactive spirit gradually changes itself into an active power capable of directing its own efforts according to ideas of self-realisation consciously pursued; and Necessity "the mother of the universe" soon becomes the Spirit of Intellectual Beauty which "consecrates

* Queen Mab, Note on VI, 198.
† *Ibid.*, VI, 199.
‡ *Ibid.*, VI, 160-62.
§ *Ibid.*, VI, 55.

with its hue " all the objects of the world and actively transforms them with its own radiance. It gives " grace and truth to life's unquiet dream*" while its " plastic stress " is an active principle which " sweeps through the dull, dense, world " and " compels all new successions to the forms they wear," torturing " he *unwilling* dress that checks its flight to its own likeness."† Thus invested with qualities of will and intelligence, it consciously regulates, according to its intellectual nature, its efforts for self-realisation. Moreover the power which Shelley recognised as working in and through the universe has not only reason and will but feeling as well. It not only thinks and acts, but feels also. It is Asia, the Universal Spirit of Love, who, out of affection for Prometheus, the prototype of Man, ventures deep into the world of primal causes and struggling through a series of varied spiritual experiences, brings about the redemption of Humanity.‡

The mental horizon of Shelley was, no longer, illuminated by Godwin's philosophy; his theories and ideals were, no longer, moulded by his erstwhile master. On the contrary, the innate idealism of his temperament was gradually asserting itself. His mind was leaning away from Godwin, distinctly towards Plato.

3

Methods of Attaining Perfection.

Godwin had, in the light of his life's experience, formulated definite ideals of the redemption of man. His keen intelligence had very critically analysed the course of contemporary events and gathered wisdom from its knowledge. He had not lost his faith in human perfection but had a clearer vision of man's future. Necessarily his ideas regarding the methods to be pursued for the attainment of human perfection were very largely influenced by what he had seen and observed.

* Hymn to Intellectual Beauty, St. III.
† *Cf.* Adonais, St. 43.
‡ Prometheus Unbound, Act III.

Godwin was too near the French Revolution to be ignorant of its excesses and its tyranny. He was thoroughly convinced of its futility to bring about any permanent improvement of society. From the standpoint of abstract principles he was conscious that revolutions seldom contribute to the dissemination of truth and rational ideas. Security, permanence, and a tranquil and dispassionate temper "are absolutely necessary for the proper exercise of the human understanding without which no real progress can be attained." But in times of revolution the most astonishing vicissitudes of fortune are of daily occurrence; and a thousand evil passions are generated. "Those who sustain the loss of their friends and relatives by a catastrophe of this nature are filled with indignation and revenge. Distrust is propagated from man to man and the dearest ties of human society are dissolved."*

Revolutions, moreover, are as oppressive as the worst forms of despotic power. Both smother free speculation with a firm hand. At times of crisis every word is dreaded and every opinion is carefully scrutinised. Truths regarded to be subversive of their own doctrines are ruthlessly suppressed.† This most odious type of despotism is, unfortunately, a peculiar characteristic of revolutionary regimes.

Abstract changes, again, Godwin pertinently pointed out, can never be fully assimilated; and it is dangerous to introduce them before the community, as a whole, has arrived at an adequate stage of intellectual development. The more gradual is the progress of reform, the greater is its chance of benefiting society. An ideal to be really effective among a people must not be too distant from its environment of thought. It must be capable of being easily adjusted to the doctrines and principles prevalent during that particular age. Revolutions confound this process of nature and "give us ideals for which we are not prepared, which we cannot effec-

* and † Godwin, Political Justice, IV. ii.

tually use." Nurtured as he is upon principles of human perfectibility, a philosopher of Godwin's school is not, in the least, impatient of the slow progress made by liberal tendencies in society. He knows that perfection always eludes the grasp of man and " confines neither his hopes nor his desires within any specific limits. For he has undertaken a labour without end and, therefore, expects that improvements should take place, in a mild and gradual though incessant advancement, and not by violent leaps nor by concussions."*

"Government," Godwin asserted, "is founded on opinion; nor can any attempt to govern men otherwise than in conformity with their own conceptions, be expected to prove salutary. A project, therefore, to introduce abruptly any political institution, merely from a view of its absolute excellence and without taking into account the state of the public mind must be absurd and injurious."† It is necessary to proceed slowly and cautiously where the problem is so complex and the stakes risked so high and comprehensive. Reason should not, consequently, be carried away by the exuberance of passion and the impetuousity of idealism. It should be sober and tranquil, spreading, in a gradual yet uninterrupted course, through society. Truth thus disseminated in slow degrees, will, at first, be comprehended by a comparatively small number of men. But every new convert will become its ardent missionary and thus the circle of its votaries will increase till the majority of men are brought under its influence.‡ It is not at all necessary to overturn a government by violence; no institution, political or social, can ever subsist in a nation, the individual members of which withdraw from it their support and confidence;§ let a nation be convinced of the desirableness of a reform; let the magic of opinion be once dissolved and the chains which had, so long, oppressed them will fall off, of themselves.‖

* Godwin, Political Justice, IV, ii.
† and ‡ *Ibid*,. III, vii.
§ *Ibid*., III, vi.
‖ *Ibid*., I, vi.

The study of Godwin's political writings exerted a profound influence on Shelley. The poet was firmly convinced that revolutionary changes cannot bring about the slightest progress of society, much less the redemption of man. Reform is possible only when the community in general has been prepared for it by the dissemination of liberal ideas. His was a " plan of amendment and regeneration in the moral and political state of society on a comprehensive and systematic philanthropy;" it was sure, though slow in its progress, "without the rapidity and danger of revolution," on the one hand and " devoid of the time-servingness of temporising reform " on the other.* Progress should not be abrupt; it must be gradual, proceeding in a cautious manner, with the ever-widening illumination of the common mind. Like Godwin, Shelley was content to wait patiently in expectation of the millennium. He might observe "many things put in train during his life-time" but he could not hope to see the work of virtue and reason finished before his death. He could only lay the foundations of progress for future generations to come.†

Moreover, every attempt at reform, according to Shelley, depends not upon any outward and adventitious circumstances but upon the character of the individuals themselves. Before the restraints of Government are lessened, it is fit that we should lessen the necessity for them. Not only so; the public communication of truth should, in no way, disturb the established usages of society which it is destined to displace. If it does so, violent and abrupt changes will, assuredly, impede the progress of the regeneration of man, which it seeks to accomplish. Unless opinions in favour of reform are widely established in society, prejudices and the natural inertia of the common people will form an insuperable barrier to all change. "Nothing can be more rash and thoughtless, than to show, in ourselves, instances of any particular doctrine before the general mass of the people are so convinced, by the reasons of the doctrine, that

* and † *Cf.* Shelley, Address to the Irish People, *Post Script.*

it will be no longer singular."* Else, the result is violence; and all possibilities for the redemption of man are destroyed.

Equally emphatic was Shelley in his condemnation of violence in any form. He deprecated "the scenes of revolutionary horror which marked the struggle of France," and was firmly convinced that, though undertaken with the best intentions, it ended ill for the people simply because violence was employed. He even did not wish to see things changed at that particular age as it could not be done without force and "force makes the side which employs it directly wrong; nor can any one approve the headstrong and intolerant zeal of its adherents."† " Do not use force nor have recourse to violence," runs as a refrain, as it were, throughout his *Address to the Irish People.* " Everything is to be dreaded," said the poet, "you, yourselves, will be unworthy of even a restoration...to your rights, if you disgrace the cause.....of truth and liberty by violence." Again : " how stupid and sottish must these men be, who think that violence and uneasiness of mind have anything to do with forwarding the views of peace, harmony, and happiness." Like Godwin, again, he prophesied that nothing is so well fitted to produce slavery, tyranny, and vice as the violence which is attributed to the friends of liberty, and which the real friends of liberty are the only persons to disdain. We should, therefore, disclaim force and trust our cause solely to its own worth. If we are convinced of the truth of our cause, we should depend wholly on its own intrinsic merit; if not, we should give it up.‡

Shelley was always conscious that true progress and true reform are slow in their growth. The clouds of ignorance and prejudice, of age-long superstitions and hoary traditions lie heavily on the minds of nations. Crime, falsehood, despotism, hypocrisy—all seek to perpetuate their sovereignty over the communities of men. Humanity groans, for centuries together, under the fetters imposed upon it by custom

* and † Shelley, Address to the Irish People.
‡ *Cf. Ibid.*

and the established institutions of society. Its efforts for self-realisation and self-development are stifled by the benumbing influence of its own environments.* Yet, let men once awaken from the stupor of slavery and ignorance; let the religious fraud and political despotism by which they had been deluded into submission be once exposed to their understanding; and at once a mighty change comes over their spirit; they are no longer inert and submissive; but like a lion shaking his mighty manes the entire people, with single-minded determination, immediately rouses itself and scatters to the four winds all impediments in the path of its progress. Despotic governments and intolerant religious systems wither away before its stern gaze, they crumble up into nothingness before its questioning glance.† The course of such a great transformation, is, however, absolutely sober and tranquil, unmarked by atrocities and uncontaminated by bloodshed. For the poet was never weary of holding up to praise " the tranquillity of successful patriotism and the universal toleration and benevolence of true philanthropy."‡

The hirelings of despotism may treacherously murder thousands of innocent patriots, trampling

> ".....in treacherous war,
> The gentle hearts whose power their lives had sought to spare."§

But when their scattered battalions are swiftly encompassed round by the revolutionary forces, the leaders of the insurgents, restrain, with wonderful discipline, all occasional outbursts of passion among their followers. For,

> " ...Wherefore should ill ever flow from ill
> And pain still keener pain for ever breed?
> We all are brethren—even the slaves who kill

* *Cf.* Queen Mab, IX.
† *Cf.* Revolt of Islam, Canto V.
‡ *Ibid.*, Preface.
§ *Ibid.*, V, vi.

For hire, are men; and to avenge misdeed
On the misdoer, doth but misery feed
With her own broken heart! *

There are moments, indeed, when the votaries of freedom are liable to be carried away by a spirit of revenge. They had suffered bitterly and now they find their oppressors helpless before their mighty hosts. It is only natural for them to mistake vengeance for justice. The very sight of their tyrannical rulers reminds them of their past misery and in exasperation, they demand blood for blood.

" .....—He who judged let him be brought
To judgement! blood for blood cries from the soil
On which his crimes have deep pollution wrought!
Shall the king only unavenged dispoil?
Shall they who, by the stress of grinding toil,
Wrest from the unwilling earth his luxuries,
Perish for crime, while his foul blood may boil,
Or creep within his veins at will?—Arise!
And to high justice make her chosen sacrifice." †

Yet even in moments of such intense excitement the leaders do not lose heart. They expostulate with the more violent of their followers and impress upon them the truth that

" .....the chastened will
Of virtue sees that justice is the light
Of love, and not revenge, and terror and despite." ‡

Thus admonished, the forces of Liberty remain true to their mission of peace and good-will. And the mighty hosts

* Revolt of Islam, V, xi.
† *Ibid.*, V, xxxii.
‡ *Ibid.*, V, xxxiv.

march along, "lifting the thunder of their acclamation," a people,

> "Made free by love,—a mighty brotherhood
> Linked by a jealous interchange of good,
> A glorious pageant." *

Their whole career is marked by jubilation and rejoicings. The city-walls are thronged on high to catch a glimpse of their glorious march and at their approach,

> ".....a shout of joyance sprung
> At once from all the crowd as if the vast
> And peopled Earth its boundless skies among
> The sudden clamour of delight had cast."†

Even their opponents are converted,

> "Those bloody bands so lately reconciled,
> Were, ever as they went, by the contrition
> Of anger, turned to love, from ill beguiled."‡

This is the ideal which Shelley always kept before him; and although, in the end, the forces of rebellion are represented as vanquished by the treachery of tyrants, although the patriots are mercilessly massacred by the hired soldiers of the confederate powers, yet, throughout the history of this revolutionary episode, the one essential principle which Shelley, in the character of Laon, placed before his readers, both by precept and by example, is an ideal of peaceful reform and not of abrupt change brought about by violent means. Perfection has to be attained after a long process of effort

* Revolt of Islam, V, xiv.
† *Ibid.*, V, xv.
‡ *Ibid.*, V, xvii.

and exertion. The happy ferment of reason and passion works steadily indeed, but cautiously none the less.*

" Yet, human spirit, bravely hold thy course
Let virtue teach thee firmly to pursue
The gradual path of an aspiring change."†

This principle of non-resistance to evil except by an enlightenment of the human intellect which Godwin enunciated and made popular is the corner-stone, as it were, of the *Prometheus Unbound*. Prometheus "nailed to the wall of eagle-baffling mountains," for three thousand years of " sleep-unsheltered hours " suffers untold misery : he undergoes not physical tortures alone but mental agony as well. With a refinement of cruelty, truly diabolical in its effects, the Furies of Jupiter reveal to him the tragedies through which Humanity will have to pass in course of its future development. The great tragedy of the martyrdom of Christ and the tremendous upheaval of the French Revolution are both slowly unrolled before the agonised gaze of the Titan; the torturers of Hell mock him to his face for kindling within man

" .....a thirst of fever fierce
Hope, love, doubt, desire, which consume him for ever."‡

Even in the midst of these sufferings, the Titan remains firm in his faith and strong in his determination. He does not submit, but awaits, with superhuman fortitude, the retributive hour of liberation. He is the type of Humanity idealised by

* *Cf.* Queen Mab, IX, 35-55.
† *Ibid.*, IX, 146-48.
‡ Prometheus Unbound, I, l. 550.

Shelley, upright and strong, yet full of love and pity. He rises superior to his own darker passions; he speaks in grief, not exultation, for misery has made him wise. All evil wishes are dead within him and he no longer desires that any living thing should suffer pain.* The redemption of man, Prometheus' release from his tortures, is brought about not by sudden violent changes, but by a slow process of development.† The Millennium comes, only when its ground has been slowly prepared by Love under the inspiration of Faith and Hope.

Associations are often regarded as useful instruments for the advancement of Humanity. Not only do they ascertain public opinion which, otherwise, would remain undetermined but they also diffuse political information in the most rapid and effective way. Thus they are indispensable for the purpose of counteracting abuses and carrying into effect measures of reform. Godwin, however, thought otherwise. He was too intimately conversant with the workings of the English Party-system and the Revolutionary Clubs in France to be enthusiastic about associations, political or otherwise. Instead of promoting truth, which alone can hasten political and social progress, they only "tend to check its accumulation and render its operation, as far as possible, unnatural and mischievous."‡ They use every artifice—patronage, list of venerable names, appeals to passions and sentiments,—to hypnotise the intellect of their fellowmen, and impose the opinions of a section of the community on the whole. Man is never permitted to think for himself; on the contrary, he is confronted with a ready-made creed and a full-fledged system of thought, either to accept or to reject. And even when he is choosing, he is never allowed to be sober, but is wheedled into surrendering his judgment to the guidance of his so-called "Leaders." He loses his personality and becomes a

* *Cf.* Prometheus Unbound, Act I, Sc. I.
† *Ibid.*, Acts II and III.
‡ Godwin, Political Justice, IV, iv.

mere instrument. He learns the Shibboleths of his party and repeats them with parrot-like regularity. He fears to "leave his mind at large in the field of enquiry"* lest he should tumble upon an opinion distasteful to his associates. His mind thus becomes " quiescent and stationary," losing all incentive towards independent speculation.

In the party itself, "the turbulent, the intemperate and the artful" gain the upper hand and tyrannise over the " more prudent and contemplative section."† Not truth but prejudice triumphs in this system. Rivalry for leadership and ambition further vitiates the foundation of parties. Opinions are held not because they are true, but because they are acceptable to the unthinking rank and file. The leaders themselves, "resign the integrity of their judgment "‡ and try to play upon the passions and prejudices of their followers.

Yet their party must always be in the lime-light. " Affairs must wait upon them, and not they upon affairs. They are not content to act,.....they must make the emergence to satisfy the restlessness of their disposition."§ The inevitable reaction follows and communities are often terrified into a fresh hardening of this orthodoxy, by the indecent clamour of party politics. Associations are, therefore, inimical to progress and stifle the growth of true freedom. They simply create a fallacious uniformity of opinion, effete and powerless, because of its very uniformity.‖

Profoundly influenced though he was by the speculations of Godwin, Shelley differed from his master in his views on the efficacy of associations to bring about the redemption of man. He did not share Godwin's strong criticism of the evil effects which result from the operation of Party Caucuses and the influence of Party Cries. Instead of stifling the independence of Reason, associations, according to Shelley, foster the cause of progress and reform. As early as 1811, he sent to Leigh Hunt a proposal for the establishment of organisations to strengthen the progressive elements in society.

* Godwin, Political Justice, IV. iv.
†—‖ *Ibid.*

It was a "scheme of mutual safety and mutual indemnification for men of public spirit and principle, which, if carried into effect, would, evidently, be productive of incalculable advantages."* The ultimate intention of his aim was to convene a meeting of " the unprejudiced members of the community whose independent principles expose them to evils."† The combined efforts of such associations and meetings would surely alleviate the condition of oppressed reformers; and a " methodical society " thus organised was the only way in which we can " resist the coalition of the enemies of liberty who, at present, render any expression of opinions on matters of policy dangerous to individuals." The poet was firmly convinced that despotism of every type had been able to gather strength and power only because the disorganised state of the community had allowed it to do so. "It has been," wrote Shelley, " for want of societies of this nature (*i.e.*, societies of reformers) that corruption has attained the height at which we now behold it;"‡ and he was absolutely certain that a society of equal extent would "establish rational liberty on a firm basis."§

In course of time, Shelley's belief in societies and public bodies grew stronger. He had read and considered the arguments of Godwin against political and social organisations as such, but they could not undermine his faith; on the contrary, whenever he was brought face to face with critical situations, he was, at once, reminded of the powerful Clubs and Societies which, during the days of the French Revolution, had exerted so great an influence over its course of events. The cause of Irish Freedom appealed to his heart and he felt that such a crisis "ought not to be permitted to pass unoccupied or unimproved;" and one of the measures which he regarded to be indispensable for the cause was the establishment of a Philanthropic Society.‖ So firm was he in his opinion on this particular point that even the

*—§ Shelley, Letter to Leigh Hunt (March 2, 1811).
‖ Shelley, Letter to Godwin (Feb. 24, 1812).

remonstrances of Godwin could not shake his faith.* He was "not forgetful or unheeding" of what his master had said of associations; yet he could not but point out how truth, though widely disseminated, cannot, of itself, produce any salutary change in society. *Political Justice*, for instance, had been published in 1793; and even after twenty years since its publication and the general diffusion of its doctrines, its influence on public affairs had been slight and almost negligible. "What has followed?" asked Shelley, "Have men ceased to fight? Have vice and misery vanished from society? Have the fire-side communications which it recommended, taken place? Out of the many who have read that inestimable book, how many have been blinded by prejudice; how many, in short, have taken it up to gratify an ephemeral vanity?"† Dissatisfied with the progress of liberalism during the twenty years which followed the wide dissemination of revolutionary principles in the works of Godwin, Shelley was constrained to admit that the state of society was retrogressive; even if it were not actually so, it was at best, stationary. The eager activity of philanthropists was, consequently, an absolute necessity.‡

Benevolence may, however, gradually spread over the country, yet it cannot be kept alive without definite organisations. "Individuals, acting singly, with the utmost energy and enthusiasm, cannot propagate and corroborate that generous and philanthropical feeling" nor sustain and develop "that love for the human race" which is, according to the poet, the one thing needful for the redemption of man and the regeneration of society. It is associations alone which can concentrate the activities of reformers on the one central purpose and effect what they could never have done, unless they were united together into a corporate body.§

Shelley was, however, too profoundly influenced by the speculative theories of Godwin to be blind to the defects inherent in corporate activities. The writings of his preceptor

*—‡ Shelley, Letter to Godwin (March 8, 1812).
§ *Cf.* Shelley, Proposals for an Association.

and his arguments were always fresh in his memory; and to them Shelley often referred as allies in the cause of liberty which he sought to vindicate. Not in vain had he been warned against fictitious unanimity; nor had he ever lost sight of the advantages of confidential discussions which Godwin had so warmly recommended. It was, therefore, only natural that the poet should propose a scheme which, he considered, would not "be contradictory but strictly compatible with the principles of *Political Justice*;"* and he was very proud to declare that his scheme had grown out of the ideas which he had received from his master,—combining as it did "the adoption of free and unfettered discussion with the rejection of superficial agreement." † Shelley was, accordingly, very careful to lay down that "any number of persons who meet together for philanthropical purposes, should ascertain, by friendly discussion, those points of opinion wherein they differ, and those wherein they coincide, and should, by subjecting them to rational analysis, produce an unanimity founded on reason."‡ Far from being coerced into compliance with the views of the majority, the minorities, in such associations, would always have, in cases of acute differences of opinion on any question of moment and interest, the right to secede—a refinement of secession which would, according to the poet, assuredly, prevent mechanical uniformity. Moreover, the discussions should receive as wide a publicity as possible and thus render ineffectual, all secret schemes of violent innovations.§ His plan proposed no hasty measures; on the contrary, its aim was a "facilitation of enquiry," rather than a tyrannical suppression of individual opinions. So sanguine was the poet in his hopes regarding the future of such associations, that he seriously thought of extending them far and wide, covering Great Britain and Ireland with a network of such societies; for

*—‡ Shelley, Letter to Eliz. Hitchener (Feb. 27, 1812).
Shelley, Letters to Godwin (March 2 and 18, 1812).
Shelley, Proposals for an Association.
§ Shelley, Letter to Eliz. Hitchener (Feb. 27, 1812).

he was sure, that by doing so he would be able to revolutionise his country without bloodshed or any other sort of oppression.*

Associations so constituted and conducted "in the spirit of sobriety, regularity and thought" are, in consideration of the reasons previously indicated, "one of the best and most efficient of those means which produce happiness, liberty and virtue." † But they must have, for their object, universal emancipation and universal happiness, and organise philanthropists who are willing "actively to engage in its cause and passively to endure the persecution of those who are inimical to its success." In his *Proposal for an Association of Philanthropists for Ireland* Shelley definitely set forth his ideas regarding the purpose and functions of such societies. "I propose," declared the poet, "……to form an association for the purposes, first, of debating on the propriety of whatever measures may be agitated; and, secondly, for carrying, by united or individual exertion, such measures into effect when determined on." —

Again: "it should be an association for diffusing knowledge and virtue throughout the poorer classes of society; for co-operating with any enlightened system of education; for discussing topics calculated to throw light on methods of alleviation of moral and political evils; and, as far as it lies in its power, actively interesting itself in whatever occasions may arise for benefiting mankind."

The first opposition which Shelley experienced was from Godwin who remonstrated with the young poet in his usual tone of firmness and candour. Though he still adhered firmly to his opinions, Shelley seemed to hear in the arguments of Godwin the voice of reason‡ and his former dogmatism was, to a very great extent, weakened. But the rudest shock that he ever received, was from the apathy of the Irish people

* Shelley, Letter to Eliz. Hitchener (Feb. 27, 1812).
Shelley, Letters to Godwin (March 2 and 18, 1812).
Shelley, Proposals for an Association.
† Shelley, Letter to Eliz. Hitchener (Feb. 27, 1812).
‡ Shelley, Letters to Godwin (March 2 and 18, 1812).

themselves. His Association proceeded "very slowly." Prejudices were "so violent in contradiction" to his principles that he was more despised as a freethinker than loved as "a votary of freedom." * "My youth is much against me," wrote the bewildered poet. "Strange that truth should not be judged by its inherent excellence, independent of any reference to the utterer!" † and he soon came to recognise the utter futility of all such schemes, especially, in the condition of society prevalent in his age. His last letters from Ireland are naturally full of despondency. In them the poet admitted in unmistakable terms the utter failure of all plans he had so diligently formed and so enthusiastically propagated. "My schemes," Shelley confessed, "of organising the ignorant (were) ill-timed.....But I submit; I shall no more address myself to the Illiterate.....I will look to events in which it will be impossible that I can share and make myself the cause of an effect which will take place ages after I have mouldered in the dust." ‡ Again: "we left Dublin because I had done all I could do; if its effects were beneficial they were not greatly so. I am dissatisfied with my success but not with the attempt." §

Moreover, the incipient individualism in the poet gradually asserted itself; his ideals of the future millennium of humanity, the description he gave of the gradual progress of man towards perfection, are all coloured by his individualistic standpoint of view. A human being, according to Shelley, is a member of the community not "as a limb is a member of the body or as what is a part of a machine, intended only to contribute to some general joint result." He is, on the contrary, created "not to be merged in the whole as a drop in the ocean or as a particle of sand on the sea-shore and to aid only in composing a mass." He is "an ultimate being made for his own perfection as his highest end, made

* Shelley, Letter (Quoted by Dowden).
† Shelley, Letter to Eliz. Hitchener (Feb. 27, 1812).
‡ Shelley, Letter to Godwin (March 18, 1812).
§ Shelley, Letter to Eliz. Hitchener (April 10, 1812).

to maintain an individual existence and to serve others only as far as consists with his own virtue and progress.* Man is now an individual, pure and simple. He requires no organisation, whether of philanthropists or of politicians and reformers, to lead him to his goal. It is the initiative of great and arresting personalities that can inspire mighty nations and rouse them from their stupor of ages. It is the personal example of such leaders which can guide them to their redemption. In his later poems, especially the *Revolt of Islam* and the *Prometheus Unbound* we do not discern any influence of this particular aspect of Shelley's thought.†

Godwin's ideals of the future redemption of man were firmly based upon his belief that positive institutions alone impede the progress of mankind and stifle their aspirations for a free and unfettered exercise of reason. They should, therefore, be suppressed altogether, or, at least, be rendered powerless.

The most efficacious way of doing so consists in appealing to the human understanding. Godwin's perfect man is an abstraction. He is Intellect Personified. Passions cannot overcome him nor the senses govern his actions. Gratitude, filial affection, reverence and other emotions he may have, but they do not smother the voice of reason. Show him in the clearest and most unambiguous manner, that a particular course of action is most reasonable in itself and he will infallibly follow it. For, according to Godwin, " We are, no longer, at liberty to consider man as *divided between two independent principles*, or to imagine that his inclinations are, in any way, inaccessible through the medium of his understanding...The thinking principle within us is uniform and simple.....There is no conduct in itself reasonable which, the refutation of error, and the dissipation of uncertainty will not make appear to be such. There is no conduct which can be shown reasonable, the reasons of which may not, sooner or later,

* Shelley, Letter (Aug. 12, 1812).

† In " A Philosophical View of Reform," however, Shelley reverted to this idea.

be made impressive, irresistible and a matter of habitual recollection. Lastly, there is no conduct, the reasons of which are thus conclusive and thus communicated, which will not be.....uniformly adopted by the man to whom they are communicated."*

Yet Godwin was constrained to admit that there is some place, however subordinate, for passion and emotion in his scheme of things. Even he had to assert that virtue, sincerity, and justice and all other principles beneficent to man, can be "strenuously espoused" only when they are "ardently loved" that is to say, if "their value is clearly perceived and adequately understood;"† and thus the Venus of Godwin stands revealed before the ardent gaze of his followers as a veritable Minerva indeed.

From his early youth, Shelley firmly believed that man being a rational creature, all his essential characteristics are lost if he fails to develop his intellect. He should not take anything on trust but should, in his onward march towards perfection, pass "the point before which he could not or used not to reason" and that also at an early stage of his life. Henceforth, he should exercise his intellectual faculties and "take interest in the inferences he draws therefrom." To forbid him the use of his intelligence is to deny him, "that which is, or ought to be, the essence of his being." Take away from man his reason, and you leave him, "not an 'animal rationale' but 'irrationale,' retaining no distinguishing characteristic of 'Man' but '*Animal bipeds implume risible.*'"‡ Not only so; Reason is the surest guide to virtue; it makes us see truth in all its beauty and grandeur, and stimulates us to exert ourselves strenuously for the attainment of perfection. The poet was, for some time at least, so fascinated by the brilliant arguments of Godwin that he accepted, without hesitation, the Godwinian ideal of man as an embodiment of intellect, uncontaminated by feelings and emotions. "How racking it is to the soul," exclaimed

* and † Godwin, Political Justice, I, v.
‡ Shelley, Letter to Sir Timothy Shelley (Feb. 6, 1811).

Shelley, " when enquiring into its own operations, to find that, perfect virtue is far from attainable, to find *reason tainted by feeling*, to see the mind, when analysed, exhibit a picture of irreconcilable inconsistencies, even when, perhaps a moment before, it had imagined that it had grasped the fleeting phantom of virtue." *

Like Godwin, also, he derived greater confidence in his ideal of human perfection from a study of History. The redemption of man is attainable only through the exercise of the human intellect and it is the task of human reason to bring about the Golden Age " whose progression in improvement has been so great since the remotest tradition, tracing the general history of man to the point at which we now stand." †

Opinion is, then, the strongest power on earth. Once set a-working, there is nothing which can oppose its activities or impede its progress. Let the increase of virtue and wisdom "lead people to find out that force and oppression are wrong and false " and no government will have the power to coerce them any longer. On the contrary, such an opinion, as soon as it gains sufficient strength will, assuredly, wrest from the clutches of an unwilling government, the rights which had been taken away from the people. Reason and virtue are absolutely necessary for happiness and liberty; and the only way in which reforms can be brought about, is by " raising up intellectual opposition to counteract the abuses of society." ‡

The effects of such appeals to the intellect are instantaneous. The old philosopher in the *Revolt of Islam* unfolds truth to his countrymen and spreads, from shore to shore, " doctrines of human power;" and at once new aspirations, a " warmer zeal " and " a nobler hope " inspire the whole nation. Tyrants now tremble in their seats of power; and

* Shelley, Letter to Eliz. Hitchener (June 20, 1811).
† *Ibid.* (Oct. 18, 1811).
‡ Shelley, Address to the Irish People.

the ministers of Fraud

> " .....can scarce dissemble
> The lies of their own heart:"

Perchance blood need not flow, perchance the very slaves would respond to the voice of reason and redemption may come by eloquent persuasions of " soul-subduing tongues " and the great strength of words.*

Similarly Laon restrains the passions of his excited followers not by a show of authority, nor by the adoption of coercive measures but by a frank appeal to their intelligence and immediately,

> " .....to the despair
> Of him whom late they cursed, a solace sweet
> His very victims brought—soft looks and speeches meet."†

Cynthia is being carried away by the slaves of tyranny, when she reveals to them the inherent injustice of political and social institutions. Her words leave a profound impression on the minds of her audience. " Thou readest well the misery told in these faded eyes," they exclaim,

> " Even from our childhood have we learned to steep
> The bread of slavery in the tears of woe."

The seamen, the pilot and even the Captain, stand in a trance and enthusiastically respond to her call for liberty.‡

Reason with Shelley had, however, a quite different significance. Instead of being completely divorced from feelings, it was the sublimated essence of their highest manifestation. It is not "a cold and insensible arbiter" but "an assemblage of our better feelings—passion considered under a peculiar mode of its operation."§ The intellectualised emotions

* Revolt of Islam, IV, xiii, xiv, xvii, xviii.
† *Ibid.*, V, xxxv.
‡ *Ibid.*, VIII, xxiii, xxvi, xxvii.
§ Shelley, Letter to Hogg (Feb. 7, 1813).

of Godwin could not satisfy the ardent spirit of Shelley; his enthusiastic nature wanted far other materials for its sustenance. It was, therefore, only natural for the poet to regard a harmonious blending of the intellect and the emotions as a necessary requisite for the happiness of man.* " Virtue consists of benevolence and justice, or rather, the *desire* to be the author of good and the *apprehension* of the manner in which it ought to be done "†—two elements of which benevolence is, surely, more powerful. " All the theories which have refined and exalted humanity or those which have been devised as alleviations of its mistakes and evils, have been based upon the elementary *emotions* of disinterestedness which, we feel, constitutes the majesty of our nature."‡ And thus the happy ferment of reason and passion works steadily on.

> " Reason was free; and wild though Passion went
> Through tangled glens and weed-embosomed meads
> Gathering a garland of its strangest flowers,
> Yet like the bee returning to her queen,
> She bound the sweetest on her sister's brow." §

Nor could love mean " clear perception and adequate understanding " as it was with Godwin. The chastened will of virtue sees that justice is the light of love—a passion and an inspiration, which totally transforms the character of men who come under its influence. Such benevolent propensities are not the product of human reason or the human understanding; they are, on the contrary, inherent in the human nature. Mind "acquires, by exercise, a habit, as it were, of perceiving and abhorring evil, however remote from the immediate sphere of sensations with which it is conversant."‖ It is impelled not only to seek

* Shelley, Address to the Irish People.
† Shelley, Speculations on Morals, Introduction.
‡ Shelley, Speculations on Morals.
§ Queen Mab, IX, 35-55.
‖ Shelley, Speculations on Morals.

its own happiness but the happiness of others as well. It sympathises with the sufferings of its fellowmen and finds, in the eradication of their pain, the true happiness of its own nature. Disinterestedness is, consequently, an instinct of the human mind, innate in his nature, which is, more or less, developed according as society is more or less civilised.* It is " the product of a cultivated imagination and has an intimate connection with all the arts which add ornament or dignity, or power, or stability to the social state of man."† Thus imagination replaces Reason in Shelley's plan of human progress. It is not reason—even as Shelley conceived it—but "imagination or, mind employed in prophetically imaging forth its objects," which constitutes the fundamental principle underlying all progress and all change. " Imagination " is that " faculty of the human nature on which every gradation of progress, nay, every, the minutest, change depends;"‡ and the only difference between selfishness and virtue is a difference in the comprehensive character of their imagination. The imagination of the virtuous man is not confined to a narrow limit, but embraces, by a strongly developed vision, a larger number of his fellow beings.§

" The greatest instrument of moral good is thus, imagination; and a man in order to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively."‖ He must try to enter into the feelings and emotions of his fellowmen and identify himself with them in their weal and woe. The pains and pleasures of humanity must be his own. Unlike Godwin, Shelley could, no longer, admit the predominance of reason as an instrument of perfection. On the contrary, mere reason or intellectual attainments are powerless; knowledge unilluminated by emotions cannot reform society. It must first be assimilated by the creative imagination of man, before it can be fully utilised. " There is no want of knowledge respecting what is the wisest and best in government and political economy, or, at least, what is wiser and better than what men

*—§ Shelley, Speculations on Morals, Benevolence.
‖ Shelley, Defence of Poetry.

now practise and endure."* Yet there is no progress in human society, no attempt to utilise this knowledge for the attainment of perfection. We seem to possess more political, moral and historical wisdom than we know how to reduce to practice. This is the paradox with which Shelley confronted the Godwinian School of Thought—a paradox inexplicable on the assumption that reason is the predominating element of human life.

To Shelley, now no longer the blind follower of Godwin, one thing is certain. The discoveries of science have, undoubtedly, extended the limit of man's control over nature: but, they have, at the same time, considerably circumscribed his mastery over the inner world of self.† "We want the creative faculty to imagine what we know;" and "the accumulation of the materials of external life, has exceeded the quantity of the power of assimilating them to the internal laws of human nature."‡ Man having enslaved the elements, remains himself a slave.

What is needed for the development of man and his ultimate attainment of perfection is not knowledge, but imagination; not the *human understanding*, but *human love;* not more "adequate conceptions of truth" as Godwin would have it, but "a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action or person not our own."§ "Until the mind can *love*," reiterated the poet significantly, "and admire, and trust and hope and endure, *reasoned principles of moral conduct* are seeds cast on the highway of life, which the unconscious passenger tramples into dust, although they would bear the harvest of his happiness."‖ Love, or sympathetic imagination is, consequently, the guiding principle of Shelley's dream of the Human Millennium. She transforms the universe and clothes its dim shapes with a divine radiance.

In the *Prometheus Unbound*, the poet uttered his prophecy in verses of exquisite melody. His new-born faith in

* Shelley, Defence of Poetry.

†—§ *Ibid.*

‖ Shelley, Introduction to "Prometheus Unbound."

love as the law of life finds, in its matchless imagery, an expression for all time. Humanity stands undaunted before the soul-killing oppression of despotic power; in the midst of his misery he feels the potent influence of love.

" And yet I feel
Most vain all hope but love."

He remembers Asia, his beloved, the spirit of beauty and love, whose footsteps pave the world with loveliness—"she, who

" .....never sleeps but when
The shadow of thy (his) spirit falls on her."

In the distant Indian valley which her very presence clothes with radiance, Asia waits, in eager expectation, for the news of Man, her Consort. She is attended not by the spirit of Understanding or Intellect but by Ione and Panthia, the spirits of Faith (or Intuition) and Hope. In the eyes of Faith, Love sees the vision of human perfection. The overpowering light of Man's immortal shape is shadowed over by Love, and the soft light of his smiles spreads like radiance from the cloud-surrounded moon. She feels within herself intuitive urgings of her own soul, vague indications of future experiences. The whole of nature around her is gradually spiritualised. The shadows of the morning clouds, the blossoms of spring, the purple mountain-slopes, have all, writ over them, appeals for action and spiritual effort. The clinging music of the pine boughs seems to utter low and sweet sounds urging her to follow the instinctive impulses of her own heart. The undefined spirit-voices of Nature echo the inspiration of her own soul; for

" In the world unknown
Sleeps a voice unspoken
By thy steps alone
Can its rest be broken."

Love must strengthen herself by passing through the whole gamut of human experience before she can attain the redemption of man. And accordingly she proceeds, in obedience to these vague yet compelling spirit-voices, through the realms of sensation, feeling and thought, beyond the world of fleeting phenomena, deep into the regions of primal causes :—

" Through the shade of sleep,
Through the cloudy strife
Of death and of life;
Through the veil and the bar
Of things which seem and are
Even to the steps of the remotest throne,"

where

" There is One pervading, One alone."

There Asia confronts Demogorgon the awful shape of the Inscrutable Mystery, that " mighty darkness," ungazed upon and shapeless, yet a living spirit. Knowledge now comes to her, not knowledge through the exercises of the Intellect but intimations received intuitively from the primal causes of things. The inevitable hour of retribution approaches near; Asia is transformed by her spiritual experiences. Love, like an atmosphere of the sun's fire filling the living world, bursts from her and illumines earth and heaven. The car of the fateful Hour rises and Jupiter, the spirit of despotism, is hurled headlong downwards by his own weight.*

This is the picture of Man's redemption as imagined by Shelley; how different from Godwin's!

* *Vide* Prometheus Unbound, Acts II and III.

4

Shelley, Godwin and "A Philosophical View of Reform."

On the 26th May, 1820, Shelley wrote to Leigh Hunt: "Do you know any publisher or book-seller who would publish for me an octavo volume eititled, 'A Philosophical View of Reform?' It is boldly but temperately written and, I think, readable." Written at a mature age the treatise represents Shelley as a realistic politician. He was no longer an imaginative poet who creates a visionary world of absolute perfection: nor a philosopher who pursues his principles to their logical conclusion. On the contrary, he was actuated by a spirit of practical idealism and sought to obtain a firmer grip upon the realities of life as it is. Abstract principles, indeed, inspired him with "tranquillity and courage and grandeur of soul;" to them, the poet must advert as "to the goal, unattainable, perhaps, by us but which, as it was, we revive in our posterity to attain;" but he refused, most irrevocably, to create, on their basis, imaginary dreams of human perfection. For here, Shelley admitted, as he did nowhere else, that his present business was with "the difficult and unbending realities of actual life" and his present endeavour, to apply himself, with patience and resolution, to "accommodating his theories to *immediate practice*."

This note of *real-politik* pervades the entire atmosphere of his thought and action. It governs his ideas and gives shape to his political principles. It rejects many of his earlier dreams and transforms many of his earlier ideals. He could no longer rest satisfied with abstract theories which he had, under the influence of Godwin, very ardently advocated during the earlier part of his poetical career. Even the very fundamental principles are shaken to their very roots.

In his earlier political pamphlets, one of the most significant ideas which receive an emphatic expression

is the close association between politics and morality. Expediency is an idol which this youthful iconoclast sought to demolish; and ethics, according to this ardent follower of Godwin, is applicable, not only to individual actions but to corporate activities as well.* His *Prometheus Unbound*, *Revolt of Islam*, and even *Queen Mab*, are efforts to lead politics back from expediency to righteousness; and in none of them do we find any the slightest hint that this close relationship is an ideal only. On the contrary, Shelley was eager to apply this principle to all concrete events of life without any mental reservation. In *A Philosophical View of Reform*, however, everything is changed. The essential conception of political truth as something opposed to moral truth has him in its firm grip. The same principle may be a moral truth without being a political one; and "Morals and politics can only be considered as portions of the same science, with relation to a system of such absolute perfection as Plato and Rousseau and other reasoners have asserted, and as Godwin has, with irresistible eloquence, systematised and developed." He did not want to fritter away his energy by trying to adjust existing institutions to such abstract principles.

The practical aim of *A Philosophical View*, also moderates, to a very great extent, the poet's hatred of positive institutions. Under the influence of his master, Shelley had, during the earlier part of his life, denounced all existing institutions as impediments in the path of human progress.† The *Queen Mab* is an impassioned plea for their abolition while the *Prometheus Unbound* celebrates, in verses of exquisite melody, their complete dissolution. In this later treatise, however, we discern some lurking sympathy for them. He was now chary of accepting principles which "social institutions cannot without mischief inflexibly secure." Government is, no longer, an evil, nor even a necessary evil. Society is instituted for "man's advantage and

* Shelley, Declaration of Rights.
† Shelley, Queen Mab.

for the advantage of others in his situation;" it is no longer the product of human weakness and human folly. Only it should be broad-based upon the willing consent of every individual belonging to the community.

Nor did the poet recommend the abolition of the entire social system; on the contrary, one of the evil effects of civil war which he deprecated is "the obliteration and the sudden disruption of the bonds of social life." Even when the popular party becomes victorious, when, to quote the words of the poet, "the people shall have obtained, by whatever means, the victory over their oppressors and when persons appointed by them shall have taken their seats in the Representative Assembly" (which, curiously enough, Shelley still retained) their mission will not be confined to mere rejoicings for their victory and the consequent disappearance of social and political tyranny (as it is in *Prometheus Unbound* and his other poetical works) but to the task of "*accommodating all that can be preserved of ancient forms with the improvements of the knowledge of a more enlightened age*," not only in legislation but in *religious* (!) and *academical* institutions as well. This is a great transformation indeed. The bitter experiences of a life-time had, indisputably, clipped the wings of this great spirit and brought him down from the abstract heights of Godwinian philosophy to the cold, hard realities of life.

Shelley, no longer, soared to the highest regions of idealism; he was no longer luminous with great ideals, nor radiant with high aspirations. His old assurance regarding the approach of the millennium had been crushed out of existence. His belief in the attainment of human perfection by one grand act of self-sacrifice and self-realisation was completely lost. He was now convinced that " it is better that one object so inexpressibly great and sacred should never have been attempted than that it should be attempted and fail." Unlike the ardent disciple of Godwin who exultantly celebrated the demolition of social and political systems in his earlier works, this worshipper of *real-politik* would fain make a compromise with his opponents. He admitted that the inspiring

influence of the great ideals of human perfection can uplift man. "Towards whatever we regard as perfect, undoubtedly it is no less our duty than it is our nature to press forward; this is the generous enthusiasm which accomplishes, not indeed the consummation after which it aspires, but one which approaches it in a degree far nearer than if the whole powers had not been developed by a delusion." But nothing is more idle than to reject a limited benefit because we cannot, without great sacrifices, obtain an unlimited one. And the poet sought to quieten the protest of the inherent idealism of his nature by pointing out that "it is no prejudice to the ultimate establishment of the boldest political innovations that we *temporize* so that when they shall be accomplished they may be rendered permanent."

Accordingly his conception of property underwent a significant change. He no longer denounced the institution of property and the principle of hereditary succession altogether. Basing (as he did in his notes to *Queen Mab*) property on "labour and skill and the immediate wages of labour and skill," the poet recognised that "the right of man to property in the exertion of his own bodily and mental faculties or on the produce and free reward from and for that exertion is the most inalienable of rights." This is true property and "all political institutions ought to defend every man in the exercise of this discretion with respect to property so acquired."

The poet still clung to the Godwinian conception that inheritance is an evil. He was of opinion that we should not acknowledge any person "to have an exclusive right to property who has not created it by his skill or labour." Yet "to avoid the greater evil of arbitrarily interfering with the discretion of every man in matters of property" he had, perforce, to tolerate it. He admitted indeed, that absolute right becomes weakened by descent. But he could not interfere with the privilege of the disposal of property by will which, he asserted, is "necessarily connected with the existing forms of domestic life." Against

the other type of property which is based on violence and fraudulent cunning, Shelley however had nothing too strong to say. Of this nature, pointed out the poet, is the principal part of the property enjoyed by the aristocrat and the fund-holder. They do not deserve the riches they possess; and when Shelley, modernist that he was, proposed a capital levy, he was careful to exempt the first type of property from its operations. "If any public emergency should arise, at which it might be necessary to satisfy, by a tax on capital, the claims of a part of the nation by a contribution from such national resources as may, with the least injustice, be appropriated to that purpose, assuredly it would not be on labour and skill, the foundation of all property, nor on the profits and savings of labour and skill, which are property itself, but on such possessions which can only be called property in a modified sense, as have, from their magnitude and their nature, an evident origin in violence and imposture." Thus did Shelley gradually recede away from Godwin under the stress of circumstances.

In one respect, however, Shelley went back to Godwin. He had, in the *Prometheus Unbound* rejected the Godwinian theory that human perfection could be attained only through the proper exercise of reason. He represented love, cosmic love, as the one actuating principle which can transform the entire universe, abolish all impediments to human progress and bring about the redemption of man and the regeneration of human society. In *A Philosophical View* he reverted to the Godwinian conception. Love was, apparently, too weak a power successfully to cope with "the difficult and unbending realities of actual life." When we study the various steps which a patriot should take for bringing about the regeneration of society, we are at once reminded of Godwin and his insistence on the efficacy of public opinion. Like his preceptor, Shelley was now sure that "no law or institution can last if public opinion be decisively against it." Accordingly he wanted to educate that public opinion. He was fully conscious that centuries of tyranny and oppression had instilled into the minds of the common people the

insidious poison of fanaticism and error. They had rendered the oppressed masses passive and inert. " The inoperative and unconscious abjectness to which the purposes of a considerable mass of the common people had been reduced," crushed out, as it were, all the manhood in their personality; and, consequently, it is the imperative duty of every patriot and reformer to rouse his fellowmen from this unnatural stupor of ages. " The patriot will, therefore, be the foremost to publish the boldest truths in the most fearless manner, yet without the slightest tincture of personal malignity." He should thus make them fully aware of their present miserable condition and its remedy. In this work of enlightenment, the patriot and reformer should not work alone but " encourage all others to the same efforts and assist them to the utmost of his power with the resources both of his intellect and his fortune." No threat, nor any injury should deter him from this course of action. The frowns of tyrants or the threats of popular fury should be equally despised. He should personally confront them with a bold face and call upon his associates " to despise imprisonment and persecution and lose no opportunity of bringing public opinion and the power of the tyrants into circumstances of perpetual contest and opposition."

Simultaneously with this active and vigilant system of opposition, the poet recommended the holding of public meetings all over the country to educate and enlighten public opinion and ventilate public grievances. But these meetings should be deliberative rather than demonstrative. They should be small, enabling each person present to take an intelligent part in their proceedings. The Shelleyan patriot should always urge " the necessity of exciting the people frequently to exercise their right of assembly" thus providing a means of "solemnly conveying the sense of large bodies and various denominations of the people in a manner the most explicit, to the existing depositories of power." Such appeals of solemn and emphatic arguments from men of immortal genius, the poet was sure, would appal the enemies of mankind with the " stern spectacle of eternity warning time."[2]

Elsewhere in the same essay the poet became much more explicit. The Godwinian theory of redemption through the illumination of the human intellect is much more fully explained and illustrated in these passages than anywhere else. "The true patriot will endeavour to enlighten and to unite the nation and animate it with enthusiasm and confidence. For this purpose he will be indefatigable in promulgating political truth." Here, as elsewhere in his *Proposals for an Association*, the poet, remembered the potency, both for good and for evil, which an organisation by itself possesses. Accordingly to give greater strength and power to the popular cause, he, in direct opposition to Godwin, recommended that the divided friends of liberty should be "rallied round one standard" and made "to forget the subordinate objects with regard to which they differ by appealing to that respecting which they are all agreed." The patriot will, assuredly, "promote such open confederation among men of principle and merit as may tend to make their intentions and their efforts converge to a common centre." But he will, at the same time (like Shelley in his early youth) " discourage all secret associations which have a tendency, by making the nation's will develop itself in a partial and premature manner, to cause tumult and confusion."

By these methods of enlightenment and systematic opposition, the oppressors, Shelley was confident, would become conscious of their powerlessness and isolation. They would, then, reluctantly, " concede some limited portion of the rights of the people." If they did so, Shelley would exhort all right-thinking men to pause until they had gained enough experience to demand more. He would rather gain his object by a process of negotiations lasting over a long period of time than precipitate matters and plunge the entire nation into the throes of a civil war.

Yet acutely conscious though Shelley was of the evil effects of internal commotions and civil war, he did not altogether preclude the necessity of armed resistance. In the days of his youthful enthusiasm the poet might not think

of the possibility of such resistance but the experience of his life-time had changed his views on this question. And strange as it may seem to us, he was, in this respect, closely following the doctrines of Godwin. This philosopher had admitted in his *Political Justice* that there can be no doubt of " the justifiableness of a whole nation having recourse to arms if a case can be made out in which it shall be impossible for them to shut out slavery in any other way." * Similarly the poet emphatically asserted that when all peaceful means prove ineffectual the oppressed masses have still one weapon left. " We are," maintained Shelley, " always to recollect that we possess a right beyond remonstrance." " It has been acknowledged by the most approved writers on the English constitution, which has, in this instance, been merely a declaration of the superior decisions of Eternal Justice, that we possess a right of resistance and the last resort of resistance is undoubtedly insurrection. The right of insurrection is derived from the employment of armed forces to counteract the will of the nation."

There are thus two Shelleys : the Shelley of *Prometheus Unbound* and the Shelley of *A Philosophical View*. The former is an out-and-out idealist, uncompromising in his attitude towards whatever he regards as an impediment to human progress, while the latter is a realist who wants to come into closer grips with the actual facts of life and, conscious of the limitations of himself and of the universe in which he lives, seeks to temporize and gain practical results.

Of these two Shelleys the first is more real than the second. His utterances in the magic lines of his poetry are more spontaneous and sincere than those of the latter. There is something halting in the tone of *A Philosophical View of Reform* which plainly shows that he was not perfectly at ease when he sought to *temporise* with his earlier opinions. It was not for nothing that the treatise was not published during the life-time of Shelley. It did not occupy in the mind of the poet that prominent place which his other works

* Political Justice, IV, i.

did. His interest did not last long. It flagged and was stifled in that uncongenial atmosphere of *practical* politics; so much so, that what comes down to us is a mere draft drawn up in a careless, half-hearted manner.

5

Conclusion.

From a study of Shelley's writings and his correspondence during the early part of his life, it has been amply demonstrated that the poet had, as early as 1810, come into very intimate contact with the writings of Godwin and had been considerably influenced by his thoughts and ideals. As early as 1814 this influence had been greatly strengthened by personal communion between himself and the Mentor of his ideal world. He thus gradually came to imbibe Godwinian Philosophy, especially its conclusions on the Human Mind, the Positive Institutions of Society and the Inner Spirit of Necessity pervading the Universe.

In some instances, *e.g.*, the theory that there are no innate ideas in the human mind, he had, in accepting the dicta of Godwin, to do violence to the instinctive idealism of his temperament. He had, very often, to compel forcibly his mind to accept conclusions repugnant to its own nature. While his mind and imagination demanded "the presence of a spirit of life throughout the Universe," * his revolutionary proclivities led him to adopt the Godwinian doctrine of Necessity. His personality made him, oftentimes, listen to echoes of intuitive inspiration from a world of spiritual existences,† and wander about in the fields of immortality,‡ where

> "The obstinate questionings
> Of sense and outward things,"

* *Cf.* Mrs. Shelley's notes on Prometheus Unbound.
† and ‡ Epipsychidion.

are all combined into " one oblivious melody confusing sense ; "* yet, his reverence for Godwin, the Apostle of the Revolution, made him stifle all doubts and difficulties and adopt, without hesitation, his associationist theories regarding the nature of the human mind.

There was, as a matter of fact, a keen opposition, sometimes implied and sometimes fully articulate,† between the poet's idealistic temperament and his intellectual adherence to the Godwinian School of Philosophy. He gradually came to acknowledge, as a result of this struggle, the existence of innate ideas and instinctive principles in the human personality. Not only so, the Godwinian Abstraction, Man, as Intellect Personified without emotions or impulses was soon replaced by more realistic interpretations of the human mind. Man became a being, complex in his nature in whom the intellect, the emotions and the impulses were harmoniously blended together. Similarly, Necessity, blind and passive, no longer governed the universe. The Spirit of Intellectual Beauty whose plastic stress sweeps through the dull, dense world, now illumined earth and heaven, the deep ocean and the sunless caves. Human Redemption was, no longer, brought about by the illumination of the Intellect alone, it became a more difficult task, involving a protracted series of spiritual experiences in which Love, Intuition and the Human Emotions played a very prominent part.

Thus the innate idealism of Shelley's nature asserted itself and, in course of time, he came to lose much of his enthusiasm for the philosophers and thinkers of the French Revolutionary Movement.‡ In the case of Godwin, this distaste was very greatly strengthened by personal considerations. In fact, Shelley's reverence for his erstwhile teacher received a very rude shock when he found the *father* intolerant of what the *philosopher* advocated. The poet had, in his early youth, written exultantly how his anti-matrimonial

* Triumph of Life.
† *E.g.*, his opinions on Associations; also, " On Life."
‡ *Cf.* Shelley, Letter to the Editor, " Examiner " (June 22, 1821).

ideas were based on the speculations of Godwin ; * and he could not reconcile himself to the inconsistency when he found the same man acting the role of an injured father and refusing to hold communion with him or Mary except through an attorney. Godwin's apparent resentment was all the more inexplicable as he did not hesitate to accept " important pecuniary favours from the man whose offence against virtue and propriety was past forgiveness." † There was, consequently, discernible in the letters of Shelley written about this time, a tone of bitterness and anger which contrasted sadly with his previous epistles. " It has perpetually appeared to me," Shelley protested, " to have been your especial duty to see that, so far as mankind value your good opinion, we were dealt justly by, and that a young family, innocent, benevolent and united, should not be confounded with prostitutes and seducers." He was, indeed, shocked and staggered at Godwin's cold injustice and lost all hopes in the future of humanity when he considered how worldly the friend and preceptor of his youth had become. " The feelings occasioned by this discovery " were sometimes bitter and excruciating.‡ Yet he was always active in his endeavour to render pecuniary assistance to the philosopher and Godwin's changed attitude could not deter him, in the least, from a proper appreciation of his merits as a thinker and a reformer. He was even then " one of the most illustrious examples of intellectual power of the present age." His researches into politics and morality the poet never ceased to recognise as unrivalled for accuracy and truthfulness. Even after years of estrangement, Shelley could rise so far above his personal resentment as to lament the unjust treatment of Godwin by his contemporaries. For daring to announce the true foundations of Morals Godwin had to suffer from the persecution of "servility, dependence and superstition." His daring opposition to the traditions universally accepted by his contem-

* Shelley, Letter to Hogg (May 12, 1811).
† *Cf.* Dowden, Life of Shelley.
‡ Shelley, Letter to Mary (Oct. 24, 1814) also, Letter to Godwin (May 3, 1816)

poraries still extorted the admiration of the poet.* He might torture Mary with threats and " solemn lies " † and pester Shelley with fresh demands for money, yet the much harassed poet could never forget his indebtedness to the philosopher. He always acknowledged that Godwin first awakened and, to a degree, still regulated his understanding ;‡ and added years only added to his respect for the intellectual powers of the thinker.‡ In spite, however, of all his veneration for the philosopher, Shelley could not, in any way, reconcile himself to Godwin, the man, with all his hard-heartedness and his sophistries. Sometimes he had to remonstrate very firmly. " Your letters," he protested, " from their style and spirit, never fail to produce an appalling effect on her (Mary's) frame.....Mary, at my request, authorised me to intercept such information as might disturb her mind. The correspondence, therefore, rests between you and me, if you should consider any further discussion of a similar nature with that in which you have lately engaged with Mary, necessary after the full explanation, which I have given, of my views and the unalterable decision which I have pronounced. Nor must the correspondence with your daughter on a similar subject be renewed. It was even wholly improper and might lead to serious imputations both against herself and you, which, it is important for her honour as well as yours, that I should not only repel but prevent." § " My astonishment," wrote Shelley again, " and I will confess when I have been treated with the utmost harshness and cruelty by you, my indignation—has been extreme, that knowing, as you do, my nature, any considerations would have prevailed upon you to have been thus harsh and cruel. I lamented also over my ruined hopes of all that your genius once taught me to expect from your virtue, when I found that for yourself, your family and your creditors you would submit to that communication with me which you once

* Shelley, Remarks on Godwin and Mandeville (1817).
† Shelley, Letter to Leigh Hunt (Aug. 5, 1819).
‡ Shelley, Letter to the Gisbornes (May 26, 1820).
§ Shelley, Letter to Godwin (April 7, 1823).

rejected and abhorred, and which no pity for my poverty or sufferings, assumed willingly for you, could avail to extort. Do not talk of *forgiveness* again to me, for my blood boils in my veins, and my gall rises against all that bears the human form, when I think of what I, their benefactor and ardent lover, have endured of enmity and contempt from you and all mankind." * Although later on, Shelley adopted a more tolerant attitude towards his father-in-law, that old tie of mutual sympathies and mutual confidence was broken once for all.

The differences between the poet and the revolutionary thinkers were more fundamental than personal; yet they were, to a great extent, coloured by his personal sentiments. Shelley was intensely emotional, his lyrics are all aflame with passion and his odes tingle with an ardent sympathy for down-trodden humanity. Moreover, he always lived in a world of ideals rather than in a world of concrete reality. Thus created and thus nurtured, the emotional temperament and idealistic mind of Shelley could not, for any length of time, be at home in the atmosphere of cold intellectualism in the midst of which he found himself. The frigid rationalism of Godwin could not satisfy his ardent disciple; a reaction was bound to set in, sooner or later. "The shocking absurdities of the popular philosophy of mind and matter, its fatal consequences in morals and its violent dogmatism" had, very early, led him to materialism, a system which had, by its seductive influences, fascinated and enthralled his mind for the time being. Shelley, however, came soon to recognise that "materialism is a seducing system to young and superficial minds: it allows its disciples to talk and dispenses them from thinking;" and thus grew discontented with the view of things it afforded. Man now became "a being of high aspirations, 'looking before and after' whose thoughts wander through eternity, disclaiming alliance with transience

* Shelley, Letter to Godwin (March 6, 1816).

and decay ; he is incapable of imagining to himself annihilation.....being not what he is, but what he has been, and what he shall be." *

Shelley had, in his early youth, regarded *Queen Mab* as the one production in which he had been able to express his ideas and aspirations regarding the future of human society. In it and especially in the philosophical notes attached to it he had, as he himself confessed,† given free and frank utterance to his views and convictions about society, religion and the withering influence of customs and institutions on the human personality. In the light of his maturer judgment these very speculations appeared to be mere cobwebs of an idle brain. The poem itself, was " worthless in point of literary composition," and still more " crude and immature in all that concerns moral and political speculations, as well as in the subtler discriminations of metaphysical and religious doctrines." ‡

In fact, Idealism which had always been a very marked trait of the poet's nature, and had so long been struggling, as it were, with the convictions and beliefs which he had inherited from his group or coterie, now re-asserted itself and transformed in its own light his opinions, social, political and religious. And this idealistic tendency of his mind grew stronger and stronger as Shelley came into more intimate contact with the thinkers and writers of classical antiquity. Even in his student life, Shelley had been an ardent admirer of Plato and had been profoundly influenced by his philosophical theories. When he went to live in Italy the atmosphere of the country, the very surroundings in the midst of which he lived, redolent, as they were, with the aroma of the past, seemed to influence him profoundly and he soon became a worshipper of the beauty which was Greece and Rome. Plato now eclipsed Godwin.

* Shelley, " On Life."
† Shelley, Letters.
‡ Shelley, Letter to the Editor, " Examiner " (June 22, 1821).

In course of time, however, the poet as he came into more intimate contact with the cold hard facts of life, became more and more fully conscious of human limitations and in his *Philosophical View of Reform* there is a note of *real-politik* which is in striking contrast with the theoretical outlook of his earlier speculations. He was no longer contented to be a mere theorist, he tried to become a practical politician.

IV

SHELLEY AND INDIAN THOUGHT.

1.

Introduction.

"I owed to him far, ah, far more than I owe to my father." So wrote Shelley of Dr. Lind, "' an eccentric old man '' with whom he came into intimate contact during his residence at Eton. The Poet's admiration for '' this physician to the Royal Household '' was expressed not only in his letters but in his imaginative works as well. He was the prototype of all benevolent teachers of youth whom Shelley depicted in his earlier poems.

The old sage who, in the *Revolt of Islam*, spent his live-long age

> '' In converse with the dead, who leave the stamp
> Of ever-burning thoughts on many a page,
> When they are gone into the senseless damp of graves.'' *

and whose spirit had thereby become '' a lamp of splendour, like to those on which it fed '' was only an imaginative re-creation of this companion of his early youth, '' free, calm-spirited, full of benevolence and youthful ardour.'' † So also was Zonoras, the instructor of Prince Athanase, on whose '' dark, cold and tempest-tost age '' truth had shone like an '' amaranth glittering on the path of frost.'' ‡

Dr. Lind's extensive travels had awakened in him an enthusiastic interest in '' Oriental lore '' and he gathered in his modest residence '' a fine collection of Indian and other eastern curiosities.'' § We can well imagine what a profound impression they left on the mind of the youthful poet.

* Revolt of Islam, IV, viii.
† Ingpen, Shelley in England, p. 68.
‡ Prince Athanase, Fragment II.
§ Ingpen, Shelley in England, p. 65.

Indian themes had now for Shelley an interest which grew with the development of his mind. His eager enquiries regarding the publication of the *Curse of Kehama*,* and his enthusiastic admiration for Miss Owenson's "*Missionary*" † were doubtless due to the atmosphere of Indian life and thought which they sought to create. When again Sir James Henry Lawrence published *The Empire of the Nairs*, a Utopian romance which professed to describe the manners and customs prevalent among the Nairs of Malabar, Shelley at once became "a perfect convert to its doctrines" and took the earliest opportunity of expressing "a high acknowledgment" of his sense of the talents and principles of its author.‡ It is also a significant fact that as early as December 24, 1812, the poet requested Clio Rickman the bookseller to send him copies of *Robertson's Historical Disquisition on India* and *Sir William Jones's works*.

Indian subjects and Indian scenes continued to exercise a very great influence over the mind of Shelley up to the end of his life.

The poet in *Alastor*, for instance, was stretching "his languid limbs"

> ".....in the *vale of Cashmire*, far within
> Its loneliest dell, where odorous plants entwine
> Beneath the hollow rocks a natural bower,
> Beside a sparkling rivulet"

when

> ".....A vision on his sleep
> There came, a dream of hopes that never yet
> Had flushed his cheek.§

* *Cf.* "When do you suppose Southey's 'Curse of Kehama' will come out? I am curious to see it....." (Shelley, Letter to Stockdale, Dec. 2, 1810).

† *Cf.* "Have you read a new novel 'The Missionary,' by Mrs. Owenson? It is a divine thing. Luxima the Indian Priestess.....is perfect. 'The Missionary' has been my companion for some time. I advise you to read it."
(Shelley, Letter to Hogg, June 27, 1811.)

‡ Shelley, Letter to Sir Henry James Lawrence (Aug. 17, 1812).

§ Alastor, ll. 144 *et seq.*

Asia, the redeemer of mankind in *Prometheus Unbound*, waits

" .....in that far *Indian* vale,
The scene of her sad exile; rugged once
And desolate and frozen, like this ravine;
But now invested with fair flowers and herbs,
And haunted by sweet airs and sounds, which flow
Among the woods and waters, from the aether
Of her transforming presence, which would fade
If it were mingled not with thine." *

In *Hellas* (1821), again, Mahmud's " restless pillow " is strewn with "opiate flowers" "stripped from Orient bowers, by the Indian billow " while an *Indian* slave breathes on him her very soul so that he might merely win " one hour of quiet sleep." †

As late as 1822, the " fair stranger " of the poet's *Unfinished Drama* comes " from the far hills where rise the springs of India." ‡ " Musk-rose leaves like flakes of crimson snow " § showered on her and her beloved ; " the crane returning to her unfrozen haunt," ‖ " the water of the springs of Himalah " ¶ seen in her vision—all seek to create an atmosphere peculiarly Indian.

It was, however, Southey and Sir William Jones who opened up (the realm of Indian life and thought before Shelley). As early as 1809, his favourite poet was Southey. He read "*Thalaba* till he almost knew it by heart."** The *Curse of Kehama* which sought to depict Indian life was his "most favourite poem."†† The atmosphere of Indian thought which this tale of Southey professed to create, its pictures of Camdeo, of Brahmah and other Hindu Gods and Goddesses, left so profound an impression on his mind that, although

* Prometheus Unbound, I, ll. 826-833.
† Hellas, ll. 1-5, also ll. 21-26.
‡ Shelley, Unfinished Drama, l. 123.
§ *Ibid.*, l. 66.
‖ *Ibid.*, l. 70.
¶ *Ibid.*, l. 150.
** Medwin, Life of Shelley, I. 60.
†† Shelley, Letter to Eliz. Hitchener (June 11, 1811).

Hinduism or its mythology was scarcely discussed or even known among cultured men and women of those days, Shelley, whenever he sought to depict the absurdities of orthodox faith, could not resist the temptation of referring to the followers of "Brahmah" along with other "religionists." Religion is, according to him, too often the "Child of prejudice and selfish fear;" and hence, "love of a Deity, of Allah, of Bramah (it is all the same) certainly springs from the latter motive." * When again, we follow the doctrines of Christ in so far as they do not differ from virtue, we are following *virtue* and not Christ or rather equally follow "Bramah and Mahomet as Christ." † The influence of the *Curse of Kehama* persisted till the end of the poet's life. As late as 1820, Shelley in his letters used words, phrases and images reminiscent of the poem; ‡ still later, in 1821 he could not describe his life in Italy without reference to "Southey's sea-serpent in Kehama." §

The Collected Works of Sir William Jones with a life of the author by Lord Teignmouth was first published in 1807. The tenth and thirteenth volumes of this publication contained reprints of his poems consisting chiefly of translations from the Asiatic languages and original compositions based upon materials derived from Indian and Arabian sources. Three years later in 1810, his poems again appeared in the XVIIIth volume of Chalmer's widely circulated collection of the works of English poets.

It is very difficult to come to any definite conclusion as to when Shelley came into contact with the works of Sir William Jones. Dr. Peck surmises that he might have read them in the library of Dr. Lind during his residence at Eton. "Remembering that Dr. Lind's travels had awakened in him an interest in Oriental lore.....we *may*," according to him, "regard it as *not unlikely* that Shelley first encountered the poetical works of Sir William Jones and

* Shelley, Letter to Hogg (April 26, 1811).
† Shelley, Letter to Eliz. Hitchener (June 11, 1811).
‡ Shelley, Letters to Robert Southey (Aug. 17, 1820).
§ Shelley, Letter to Thomas Love Peacock (Aug. 10, 1821).

Volney's Ruins of Empires in the Library of the Royal Physician at Windsor." * In the absence of any other corroborative evidence, it is very hazardous to accept this surmise as correct. Koeppel asserts that Chalmer's edition of the works of English poets was very widely read and Shelley must have read Jones's poems in this important collection. He further points out that it was " the reading of this which left a fresh impression on his mind."† Though plausible, this suggestion requires further proof for acceptance. Shelley must, however, have come to know of the authoritative position which Sir William Jones then occupied as an interpreter of Indian thought through a study of his favourite poem, *The Curse of Kehama*. Southey in his notes to the poem quotes profusely from that orientalist's works.‡

Some references in the letters of Shelley are of interest in this connection. On June 11, 1811, the poet wrote to Elizabeth Hitchener : " Mars was personified as the God of War, Juno of Policy, etc. But you have formed in your mind the Deity of virtue ; this personification, beautiful in poetry, inadmissible in reasoning, in the true style of Hindoostanish devotion you have adopted.....I was against this for the sake of truth." It is doubtful whether Shelley got his idea of an allegorical tendency in " Hindoostanish devotion " from Sir William Jones or from Southey. In the Arguments with which Sir William Jones introduces his hymns he points out indeed that the different gods of Hindu mythology are personifications of abstract qualities. " Retty " for instance, signifies " affection " ; § " Sri or the Ceres of India " is, similarly, " the preserving power of nature or in the *language of Allegory* the consort of Vishnu or Heri, a personification of divine goodness " || but Southey also, under

* Peck, Life of Shelley, Vol. I, pp. 24-25.

† Koeppel, Shelley's Queen Mab and Sir William Jones's Palace of Fortune (Englische Studien, Vol. XXVIII, pp. 45-53).

‡ " Southey acknowledged his debt to Jones in his *Preface* to *The Curse of Kehama*.....and in at least a dozen notes to that poem " (Peck, Life of Shelley, Vol. I, p. 306).

§ Sir William Jones, Works, XIII, p. 236.

|| *Ibid.*, XIII, p. 290.

the influence of Sir William Jones, refers to the same tendency in the mythology of Hindusthan.* On a subsequent date, Shelley confesses himself to have " been sacrificing at the altar of the Indian Camdeo, the God of *mystic love*." Camdeo appears not only in the *Curse of Kehama* but also in Sir William Jones's *Hymn to Camdeo* † In Southey, however, he possesses nothing of that mystic quality with which Shelley invests him. The poet's conception is, on the contrary, more closely related to the figure of Camdeo—" soul-kindling, world-inflaming, and star-ycrowned " portrayed by Sir William Jones. It is, consequently, very probable, if not certain, that the poet read this hymn before June 21, 1811, the date of his letter to Elizabeth Hitchener ; and his keen appreciation of the world of thought and emotion represented in these poems made him eager to possess a copy of the collected works of the author.

Shelley had now in contemplation a poem which he intended " to be by anticipation, a picture of the manners, simplicity and delights of a perfect state of society, tho' still earthly." Shortly after his return from Ireland the poet began its composition and, by August 1812, he sent to Hookham, as a specimen, all that he had written of a long philosophical poem which was afterwards published as *Queen Mab*. It is only natural that fresh from his study of Sir William Jones, Shelley should introduce into *Queen Mab* incidents, situations and ideas which bear a very close resemblance to those of Jones. Koeppel has very successfully pointed out the indebtedness of Shelley to *the Palace of Fortune* written by that great orientalist out of materials derived from eastern writers. The personality of *Queen Mab*, her descent from the dazzling chariot, her knowledge of all men's thoughts, her clear silver tones " unheard by all but gifted ears," and, last but not the least, the cloud-palace from

* *Cf.* " The allegory (in the Trimurti) is obvious ".....Again : " their hundred hands are but a clumsy *personification* of power ; their numerous heads only a gross image of Divinity." (Southey, Introduction to the Curse of Kehama).

† Sir William Jones, Works, XIII, p. 237.

the majestic hall of which she shows Ianthe the distant rolling globe—all such significant deviations from Volney's *Ruins of Empires* are, according to him, borrowed from the *Palace of Fortune*.*

2.

Sir William Jones and Shelley's World of Thought.

From the earliest period of his life, there is discernible in Shelley a strain of idealism which marked him out from his contemporaries. When he came into contact with the experiential school of thought this innate idealism of his nature received a rude shock and, for some time at least, he seemed to accept the fundamental principles of materialism. But the mystic element which had always lain dormant in his personality very soon re-asserted itself and triumphed over the sceptical tendencies of his youth. His attitude towards the world of sense, except during the short interval when he declared himself an atheist, is characteristic of his idealistic temperament. As early as 1811, he was conscious of " some vast intellect animating infinity "† and yearned for a belief in " the soul of the universe, the spirit of universal imperishable love." ‡ Yet in these speculations of his earlier years, the poet did not deny the objective reality of the world of sense. On the contrary, the most insignificant objects, " the leaf of a tree," " the meanest insect on which we trample," were not only real but became the basis on which he founded his belief in the Universal Spirit. When again the poet argued that God is merely " a synonima (*sic*) for the existing power of existence " or that " it is the essence of the universe and the universe is the essence of it," § he was simply recognising the world of sense as existent and real.

* Koeppel, Shelley's Queen Mab and Sir William Jones's Palace of Fortune (Englische Studien, Vol. XXVIII, pp. 45-53).

† Shelley, Letter to Hogg (Jan. 3, 1811).

‡ *Ibid.* (Jan. 12, 1811).

§ Shelley, Letter to Eliz. Hitchener (June 11, 1811).

His fervent admiration for Platonic philosophy however, very soon changed his attitude towards the world of sense. The beautiful picture that Plato painted of the phenomenal world, as shadows cast on the walls of a cave, exerted considerable influence over the mind of the poet and as early as 1809 he could conceive of " shadows that float over Eternity's vale." * Under the influence of the Greek Philosopher, the world of sense gradually came to lose a considerable part of its reality. In Platonic philosophy, the " Phenomenon so far as it exists is immanent in the Idea—its allotted share of Being is only the Being of Idea in it." † Similarly, in *Queen Mab* the phenomenal world is real only in so far as it is instinct with soul ; else it is

" the *phantasmal scene*
That floats before our eyes in wavering light,
Which gleams but on the darkness of our prison."

(VI, ll. 192-194.)

Like the ideas of Plato—

" *Soul is the only element*: the block
That for uncounted ages has remained
The moveless pillar of a mountain's weight
Is active, living spirit.

(IV, ll. 140-143.)

Shelley, however, did not accept the Platonic world of ideas. That hierarchy of logically coherent Ideas which are not only self-subsistent entities but energetic powers as well, had no meaning for the poet. On the contrary, he regarded the ideas or prototypes as " forms existing in the mind of the creator ;" ‡ they subsist (to echo the words of Berkeley) in the mind of some Eternal Spirit. Bereft of this world of Ideas, the world of phenomenon gradually lost all its objective reality.

* A Dialogue, l. 22.
† Zeller, Plato and the Older Academy, p. 317.
‡ Shelley, Defence of Poetry.

In *Queen Mab* and his earlier poems, Shelley recognised the relative reality of the world of sense. The external world might depend for its Being on Soul or the Spirit of Nature but it exists none the less. In his *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, the spirit invests with " truth and grace life's unquiet dream," while in *Adonais* the picture that he paints of the " one spirit's plastic stress " which

> " Sweeps through the dull dense world, compelling there,
> All new successions to the forms they wear;
> .....bursting in its beauty and its might
> From trees and beasts and men into the Heaven's light."

is that of an external world formed and rendered beautiful indeed by the spirit of love but none the less existent and real.

As early, however, as 1816, Earth's phantasmal scene made the poet more and more conscious of the eternal flux of things. Mutability alone endures, everything else is fleeting. It arises and then passes away without ever attaining true Being.* Life itself is illusory—a thin veil which conceals reality.

It

> " but mimics all we would believe
> With colours idly spread:

and on it are pictured " unreal shapes " † which impose upon the credulity of man.

This sense of the unreality of human life and the external universe gradually grew stronger and the poet soon came to the conclusion that

> " .....in this life
> Of error, ignorance, and strife,
> Where nothing is, but all things *seem* "

* Mutability (1816), St. 4.

† Sonnet (1818) : G. S. Brett, in Shelley's Relation to Berkeley and Drummond regards this as " good Berkeleianism *in a sense*." He forgets that the philosopher never refers to our world of existence as unreal in any sense whatsoever. *Vide* quotations in Notes, p. 252.

we are mere " shadows of a dream " and Death itself may now well appear " like all the rest, a mockery." * Even in *Adonais*, man leads a life of " stormy visions " and " mad trance " in " unprofitable strife " with unsubstantial " phantoms;" † while in *Hellas*, the mysterious personality of the Wandering Jew is conjured up before our mind's eye only to assert that—

" .....This Whole
Of suns, and worlds, and men, and beasts, and flowers,
With all the silent or tempestuous workings
By which they have been, are, or cease to be,
Is but a vision.‡

Ahasuerus who develops this extremely idealistic conception of the universe has been regarded as an Interpreter of Berkeleyan Philosophy.§ But the picture he paints of the world of sense is essentially different both from Berkeleyan idealism, and Platonic philosophy. Far from regarding the world of sense as chimerical, Berkeley draws a distinction between " real things and chimeras." Real things are ideas imprinted on the senses by the author of nature; and the philosopher significantly protests against the view that according to his philosophy all that is real and substantial in nature is banished out of the world; on the contrary, he emphatically asserts that " whatever we see, feel, hear, or anywise conceive or understand remains as secure as ever and is as real as ever." || Plato indeed by his representation of the

* Sensitive Plant, Conclusion, St. 3.
† Adonais, St. xxxix.
‡ Hellas, ll. 776-780.
§ Dr. Peck, for instance, calls him, " The Shelleyan Oracle of Berkeley's Philosophy " (Peck, Life of Shelley, Vol. I, p. 51).
Philosophy " (Peck, Life of Shelley, Vol. I, p. 51).
Cf. " All things that exist, exist only in the mind, that is, they are purely notional. What, therefore, becomes of the *Sun*, moon and stars? What must we think of houses, rivers, mountains, *trees*, stones; nay, even of our own bodies? Are all these but so many chimeras and illusions on the fancy. To all which.....I *answer*, that by the principles premised, we are not deprived of any one thing in nature.....There is a *rerum natura*, and the distinction between realities and chimeras retains its full force." (*Ibid.*, XXXIV). Again: " That the things I see with mine eyes and touch with my hands *do exist*, *really exist*, I make not the least question." (*Ibid.*, XXXV).

world of sense as shadows cast on the wall gives countenance to the theory that the external world is of an illusory character; his significant contrast between Being and Becoming may lend further colour to such a view; but as has been very pertinently observed by Zeller, although the phenomenon is only the adumbration of the idea, and that which distinguishes the phenomenon from the idea may be defined as non-Being, it is not in truth absolute unreality.* This totality is rather a *middle term between* Being and non-Being,† the province of opinion rather than of knowledge.‡

It is this conception of the universe of sense as a vision, a chimera or an illusion which approaches nearest to Indian thought; and in his development of this theory Shelley was profoundly influenced by Hindu philosophical ideas with which he had come into intimate contact through the works of Sir William Jones. According to Sir William Jones the inextricable difficulties which we have to encounter by accepting the " vulgar notions of material substances " led to the development of extreme idealism among the ancients. The Hindus, for instance, regarded the entire creation " rather as an *energy* than a *work*, by which the Infinite Being, who is present, at all times, in all places, exhibits to the minds of his creatures, a set of perceptions, like a wonderful picture or a piece of music, always varied yet always uniform, so that all bodies and their qualities exist, indeed, to every wise and useful purpose, but exist only so far as they are perceived." Though the Hindu view-point as represented by Jones is closely akin to Berkeleyan idealism, it is sharply differentiated therefrom when this operation of the Deity is represented as " illusive," " Māyā " or " Deception."§ According to Sir William Jones, not only the secondary qualities perceived by our senses but the primary qualities also must be ascribed to the immediate influence of Māyā; they are equally illusory—

* Zeller, Plato and the Older Academy, p. 333.
† *Ibid.*, p. 228.
‡ *Ibid.*, p. 226.
§ Sir William Jones, Works, XIII, p. 303.

" Blue crystal vault, and elemental fires,
That in the ethereal fluid blaze and breathe;
Thou tossing main, whose snaky branches wreathe
This pensible orb with intertwisted gyres;
Mountains, whose radiant spires
Presumptuous rear their summits to the skies,
And blend their em'rald hue with sapphire light
Smooth meads and lawns, that glow with varying dyes
Of dew-bespangled leaves and blossoms bright,
Hence vanish from my sight;
Delusive pictures! unsubstantial shows! " *

The influence of this Hindu conception is plainly discernible in the picture of the external world of sense which Ahasuerus paints in *Hellas*. When he urges that

" .....Earth and ocean,
Space, and the isles of life or light that gem
The sapphire floods of interstellar air,
This firmament pavilioned upon chaos,
With all its cressets of immortal fire " †

are but visions, we are at once reminded of those delusive pictures, unsubstantial shows—the " crystal vault " and the " elemental fires " " the tossing main " and " the pensible orb " which figure so prominently in Jones's *Hymn to Nārāyaṇa*. When again all that this world inherits or possesses are represented as

" motes of a sick eye, bubbles and dreams " ‡

the poet definitely rejects both his masters, Plato and Berkeley and accepts the Hindu Idea of Māyā or delusion.

This delusive vision of the universe is, according to Indian thought as represented by Sir William Jones, a veil.

* Sir William Jones, Works, XIII, pp. 308-9.
† Hellas, ll. 770-74.
‡ *Ibid.*, ll. 779-80.

When, for instance,

> " Full-gifted Bramah! Rapt in solemn thought
> He stood and round his eyes fire-darting threw "

and enquired for ages " what were his powers, by whom and why conferred? " the only answer he received was that the universe is the irremovable veil of Nārāyaṇa and all attempts to rend it are vain.* It is Bhavānī, Prakriti or Māyā who knits with sunbeams " the mystic veil " of the universe—a veil which remains irremovable for ever.†

This symbol of the veil had, for Shelley, a significance which it could not have for others. Like Bhavānī in the oriental hymns of Jones, Time appears in the earlier poems of Shelley as knitting the veil of the universe. " Earth's unsubstantial mimicry " is but a veil which conceals Eternal Reality.‡

Nor less conscious is the poet of the fact that this veil of the universe cannot be rent asunder without serious consequences. In the *Hymn to Nārāyaṇa*, Brahmah cannot remove the veil of the universe. In the *Hymn to Bhavānī*, it is " a mystic veil for ever unremoved " which Prakriti weaves. Shelley does not indeed regard the veil of the universe or of life either as " for ever unremoved ;" but it is removed only after man reaches perfection. For ordinary human beings, however, the poet utters a warning almost echoing " the unknown all-knowing word " which Bramah heard. " My veil thou canst not move " so warns Nārāyana. " Lift not the painted veil " exclaims Shelley,

> " Lift not the painted veil which those who live
> Call life: though *unreal shapes* be pictured there:

and he adds :

> " I knew one who had lifted it—he sought,
> For his lost heart was tender, things to love,
> But found them not, alas! nor was there aught
> The world contains, the which he could approve.

* Sir William Jones, Works, XIII, p. 307.
† *Ibid.*, XIII, p. 263.
‡ Daemon of the World, Part I, l. 99.

He became

> " A splendour among shadows, a bright blot
> Upon this gloomy scene, a Spirit that strove
> For truth, and like the Preacher found it not." *

There is also discernible in these poems a close resemblance to Hindu thought when the poet points out, time and again, that it is only by rending this veil that we can arrive at truth. It is only when " Time's eternal veil " is rent that Hope can be " seen beaming through the mists of fear." † The glorious destiny of man cannot be revealed to the human spirit unless and until the gloomy shroud of mutability woven by time is torn asunder. Both these ideas persist in his later poems as well. Life in *Prometheus Unbound* is represented as a " painted veil ; " it mimics " as with colours idly spread " " all men believe or hope." On the redemption of man " it is torn aside ;" the loathsome mask falls away, and the human millennium stands revealed in all its glory.‡

In the visible world the Sun, according to Plato, "brings forth simultaneously knowledge and life." He enlightens the eyes, reveals things seen and causes growth and increase everywhere in this universe.§ In fact, light is generally regarded as illuminating the darkness and revealing the truth. In the Upanishads, however, as Sir William Jones observes, this very light is described as hiding the truth. " Unveil," says the Rishi of Isopanishat,‖ " Oh thou who givest sustenance to the world, that face of the true sun, which is now hidden by a *vase of golden light* so that we may see the truth and know our duty." This conception wielded a very great influence on the mind of Sir William Jones. Prakriti or Bhavānī knits the mystic veil of the universe with sunbeams : The empyrean train of Indra weaves " a veil of many coloured

* Sonnet (1818).
† Queen Mab, VIII, ll. 10-13.
‡ Prometheus Unbound, III, ii, l. 190 *et seq.*
§ Zeller, Plato and the Older Academy, pp. 279-80.
‖ Sir William Jones, Translation of Isavasyam (Works, XIII, p. 376).

light'' that "eyes unholy of sense bereaves.''* Keenly sensitive as Shelley was to the illusory character of the world of sense, he could not but be attracted to this unusual imagery in the Hymns of Sir William Jones. Thus to Shelley day becomes a mere veil, which, on the approach of evening, '' falls from the world of sleep.'' In the *Triumph of Life*, again,

> " .....the scene came through
> As clear as when a *veil of light* is drawn
> O'er evening hills they glimmer.'' (ll. 30-33.)

The Semi-chorus in *Hellas*, similarly, calls upon the '' Beacon of Love '' and the " Lamp of the free '' to

> " Guide us far, far away,
> To climes where now *veiled by the ardour of day*
> Thou art hidden.'' (ll. 1041-1044.)

Shelley regarded ideas as mere mental concepts. He did not believe in a correlated and graduated series of ideas which Plato sought to establish in his Philosophy; consequently the difficulties which the Greek Philosopher had to encounter in giving a logical interpretation of the relationship between the world of ideas and the world of sense had no significance for the poet. Hence in the earliest stage of his mental development he was only conscious of an external world of sense permeated and pervaded by spiritual principles. In his epistolary controversies with Elizabeth Hitchener and Hogg he conceived of this principle as " one vast intellect animating Infinity '' or " as the essence of this universe ''† and although in his attempts to give a rational explanation of the eternal conflict between good and evil he was sometimes constrained to conceive of two spiritual powers,‡ yet

* Sir William Jones, Works, XIII, p. 271.
† Shelley, Letter to Eliz. Hitchener (June 11, 1811).
‡ Revolt of Islam I, xxv.

the idea most persistent in his mind was that of a universe which received its objective reality from a spiritual entity immanent in it. In his earliest speculations this all-pervading Spirit partakes of the nature of the World-soul as conceived by Plato.* The poet seemed to regard the universe as a living entity of which the Spirit was the soul. But unlike the world-soul of Plato this Spirit was eternal and not generated †...it was also the absolute reality and not merely something which participates in reality.‡

In course of time, however, Shelley fell under the influence of Hume and the French materialists. The Doctrine of Necessity now appeared to render a satisfactory explanation of the universe; and accepting the standpoint of Godwin he represented the spirit of the universe as Necessity.

Even in a tempest—

> " No atom of this turbulence fulfils
> A vague and unnecessitated task,
> Or acts but as it must and ought to act." §

There are, however, in *Queen Mab* itself, certain characteristics of this Universal Spirit which sharply distinguish it from the Godwinian Principle; with Godwin Necessity is a *law* according to which the activities of the universe proceed along. It has no personality of its own, no power or purposive action. Shelley, on the contrary, invests Necessity with will,‖ " activity and life; ¶ she is " active, steadfast, and eternal—" ** a power which " cheers, strengthens and guides."††

In this conception of the Universal Spirit as a power Shelley seems to have been considerably influenced

* Zeller, Plato and the Older Academy, p. 344.
† *Ibid.*, p. 341.
‡ *Ibid.*, p. 354.
§ Queen Mab, VI, ll. 171-73.
‖ *Ibid.*, III, 233.
¶ *Ibid.*, VI, l. 148.
** *Ibid.*, VI, l. 156.
†† *Ibid.*, VI, ll. 157-59.

by Hindu thought as represented by Sir William Jones. The fleeting fabric of the external world is, according to Hindu thought, the work of Māyā or delusion; she it is who creates the world of appearances and works through it. Cognate with this thought is the conception that the transmutation of forms, temporary destruction and regeneration, are the principal operations of Prakriti or "Nature," the *Sakti* or active power of Iswara who is quiescent. "The female divinity, in the mythological systems of the East" Sir William Jones observes, "represents the active power of the *male*: and that Isi means *active*. Nature appears evidently from the word *Sacta* which is derived from *Sacti* or power, and applied to those Hindus who direct their adoration principally to that Goddess." * Like Prakriti or Māyā celebrated by Sir William Jones, the Universal Spirit of Necessity which in *Queen Mab* pervades nature is, according to Shelley, a Sakti, a power. She may not be the "Mother of Gods" like Bhavānī but she is none the less the "Mother of the World," and we seem to hear echoes of both the thought and the language of the oriental Hymns of Sir William Jones when Shelley breaks out into a pæan of praise to

> "Spirit of Nature! all-sufficing Power,
> Necessity! thou Mother of the world." †

In *Alastor*, again, she is "Our Great Mother," who imbues our souls with natural piety to feel, "the love of Earth, Ocean, Air, our beloved Brotherhood," and with a heart full of reverence and fervent admiration does Shelley invoke her to inspire his song:—

> "Mother of this unfathomable world:
> Favour my solemn song, for I have loved
> Thee ever, and thee only; I have watched

* Sir William Jones, Works, XIII, p. 244.
† Queen Mab, VI, 197-98.

Thy shadow, and the darkness of thy steps,
And my heart ever gazes on the depth
Of thy deep mysteries." *

The concept of a quiescent Iswara and an active Sacti influenced the mind of the poet even when he was describing the redemption of humanity in *Prometheus Unbound*. In that symbolical drama, Prometheus remains inactive " nailed to this wall of eagle-baffling mountain " waiting patiently for his redemption. It is Asia the ever active power of love who, like another Sakti, arises from the " lovely vale in the Indian Caucasus " and inspired by " visions of future triumph," pursues her journey through the wide world of human experience, till she reaches the secret abyss of Being, the presence of that awful shape Demogorgon : and then suddenly there bursts from her

" Love, like the atmosphere
Of the Sun's fire filling the living world,"

illuminating with its radiance

" .....earth and heaven
And the deep ocean and the sunless caves
And all that dwells within them ;"

She is here the active Principle, as it were, of Prometheus, a principle which fills the universe with her radiance and creates a new heaven and a new earth. †

Prakriti or Māyā which weaves the mystic veil of the universe is, according to Sir William Jones, only the active power, the will of the Lord ; and the poet represents the God Nārāyaṇa to be the only reality.

* Alastor, ll. 18-23.
† Prometheus Unbound, Act II, Sc. V, ll. 26 *et seq.*

It is " His will " which " inspirits all " and " his sovereign Māyā " which " reigns " and Sir William Jones describes in glowing colours how this *one* Being by an act of will

> " From Unity diversified he sprang,
> While gay creation laughed, and procreant nature rang."*

With the gradual strengthening, in Shelley's mind, of the conviction that this universe is but a vision, the poet reached out to a more uncompromising Monism. Even in *Prometheus Unbound* the ultimate Reality is *One* and *One* alone. Asia, the power of Love in the external world is invited with " beckoning smiles " by spirit voices—

> " To the deep, to the deep,
> Down, down!
> Through the shade of sleep,
> Through the cloudy strife
> Of death and of life;
> Through the veil and the bar
> Of things which seem and are
> Even to the steps of the remotest throne,
> Down, down! †

and although there is no evidence regarding the source of the poet's inspiration when he describes the progress of Asia to the depths of ultimate Reality, the aroma of Upanishadic thought seems to cling to her as she proceeds along

> " Through the gray, void abysm,
> Down, down!
> Where the air is no prism,
> And the moon and stars are not,
> And the cavern-crags wear not

* Sir William Jones, Works (XIII, p. 306).
† Prometheus Unbound, Act II, Sc. III, ll. 54-62.

The radiance of Heaven,
Nor the gloom to Earth given,
Where there is One pervading, One alone,
Down, down! " *

We are here reminded of the famous Upanishadic text in which the ultimate Reality is represented as existing where the sun doth not shine nor the moon and the stars; where the lightning doth not flash nor doth fire. It seems that the poet, drinking deep at the fountain-head of Hindu thought had so far imbibed its essence as to adopt unconsciously not only its ideas but its images as well.

In the later poems of Shelley the transitory, chimerical character of the world of sense becomes more and more definite and significant. There is *one* reality " One Pervading, One alone." The One remains, the many change and pass and life stains the white radiance of eternity.† This extreme form of idealism was indeed considerably coloured by Plato and Berkeley but we can discern the influence of Indian thought when in his unfinished Drama (1822) the Spirit underlying nature describes its own activities—

Within the silent centre of the earth
My mansion is; where I have lived insphered
From the beginning, and around my sleep
Have woven all the wondrous imagery
Of this dim spot, which mortals call the world;

* * * *

And as a veil in which I walk through Heaven
I have wrought mountains, seas, and waves,
and clouds,
And lastly light, whose interfusion dawns
In the dark space of interstellar air.‡

* Prometheus Unbound, Act II, Sc. III, ll. 72-81.
† Adonais, St. lii.
‡ Fragments of an Unfinished Drama, Fragment I, ll. 15-26.

The world of sense is thus a wondrous imagery woven by the pervading spirit. Its appearances are unsubstantial and they envelop ultimate reality as a veil.

Shelley's conception of the human soul, again, reveals interesting points of resemblance with Hindu thought. " The pure enlightened souls," according to the Upanishads as translated by Sir William Jones, " is itself a ray from the infinite spirit which pervades all which existed with no cause but itself, which created all things as they are in ages very remote." * This representation of the human soul as a ray from the divine Over-soul appealed to the imagination of Shelley and in *Adonais*, Keats' soul is described as emanating from the burning fountain of the Eternal spirit.† The human soul, according to Shelley, does not die with the physical death of man. On the contrary, following closely the Platonic conception of immortality Shelley represents it as living insphered in the unapparent ‡ or even as

" .....through birth's orient portal
And death's dark chasm hurrying to and fro." §

Sometimes, however, the poet deviates from this conception of the permanent existence of the individual soul. Under the influence of Sir William Jones who in his translation of the Isopanishat represents the Rishis as praying that their souls " may return to the Immortal spirit of God after death," ‖ the poet describes that after death the pure spirit of Keats—

" .....shall flow
Back to the burning fountain whence it came,
A portion of the Eternal, which must glow
Through time and change, unquenchably the same." ¶

* Sir William Jones, Works, XIII, p. 375.
† Adonais, St. xxxviii.
‡ Adonais, St. xlv, lv.
§ Hellas, ll. 202-03.
‖ Sir William Jones, Works, XIII, p. 377.
¶ Adonais, St. xxxviii.

Nay more, it spreads itself—

> " .....wherever that Power may move
> *Which has withdrawn his being to its own;*
> Which wields the world with never-wearied love,
> Sustains it from beneath and kindles it above." *

This, however, may be only a passing thought in the poet's mind and in the same poem we find him singing rapturously of the individual soul of Keats taking its place among the inheritors of unfulfilled renown, and

> " .....burning through the inmost veil of Heaven,
> The soul of Adonais, like a star
> Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are." †

Southey and " the Triumph of Life."

The Curse of Kehama, as has been observed before, exerted a very great influence over the mind of the poet. Many of the descriptions, incidents, situations and ideas in *Queen Mab* bear the impress of this Indian tale of Southey. Ianthe in her death-like trance, the celestial car which carries her to the palace of Queen Mab, the fairy Queen's loving and sympathetic treatment of her beloved *protegée*—all seem to have been, consciously or unconsciously, adapted from Southey.‡

No less profound was the influence of its particular situations on the later poetry of Shelley.

In Canto XIV of the *Curse of Kehama*, Southey vividly describes the progress of great Jaga-Naut through the sacred city where he resides adored by myriads of worshippers. The

* Adonais, St. xlii.
† *Ibid.*, St. lv.
‡ Peck, Life of Shelley, Vol. I, pp. 303 *et seq.*

silent night is startled with " the brazen trumpets' blare;" The moon

> " .....whose quiet light serene
> Filleth wide heaven, and bathing hill and wood
> Spreads over the peaceful valley like a flood."

is dimmed with the glare of torches; while

> " .....the wild rout, with deafening song and shout
> Fling their long flashes out,
> That, like infernal lightning, filleth the air." (st. 4)

The frantic votaries fall prone before the chariot of the God and lay their " self-devoted " bodies to " pave the chariot-way " of their Deity ; and

> " .....On Jaga-Naut they call,
> The ponderous Car rolls on, and crushes all.
> Through flesh and bones it ploughs its dreadful path.
> Groans rise unheard: the dying cry,
> And death and agony
> Are trodden under foot by yon mad throng
> Who follow close, and thrust the deadly wheels along."

This powerful description of a religious rite which Englishmen of that age believed to be current among the Hindus imprinted itself firmly on the imagination of the youthful poet. In *Queen Mab* he could not forget this awful scene. They seemed to float before his mind's eye,—these hosts who

> " Stain His death-blushing chariot-wheels, as on
> Triumphantly they roll, whilst Brahmins raise
> A sacred hymn to mingle with the groans;"
>
> (VII, 34-36.)

Long afterwards in the spring of 1822 when Shelley described his vision or rather " trance of wondrous thought "

regarding the triumph of life, the same scene unrolled itself before his mind. Like the votaries of Jaga-Naut the frequenters of life's pathway grow frantic and wild in their mood of ecstasy and there appears before the wandering gaze of the poet a mighty chariot. It comes majestically along on the silent " storm of its own rushing splendour " even as the car of Jaga-Naut did in Southey's poem.

This chariot of life enshrines in itself an awful shape as hideous as the " seven-headed image " of Jaga-Naut which is throned aloft in state in the *Curse of Kehama*. " The raging rout, the frantic shout and the deafening roar " associated in Southey's mind with the car-festival are all reproduced in the magic verses of Shelley.

The poet—

" Saw, like clouds upon the thunder-blast,
The million with fierce song and maniac dance
Raging around "

" The wild dance maddens in the van, and those
Who lead it—fleet as shadows on the green,
Outspread the chariot, and without repose
Mix with each other in tempestuous measure
To savage music, wilder as it grows,
They, tortured by their agonising pleasure,
Convulsed and on the rapid whirlwinds spun
Of that fierce Spirit, whose unholy leisure
Was soothed by mischief since the world begun,
Throw back their heads and loose their streaming hair."

Though this description of the frenzy of the votaries of life may owe something to similar ecstatic dances of Maenads and Bassarids celebrated in classical tradition, the source of Shelley's inspiration becomes all the more definite when in the very next episode this wild and frantic throng is represented as crushed to death beneath the wheels of the chariot. Not only so, the same note of self-immolation before their

God is present here as in the descriptions of Southey :—

" Maidens and youths fling their wild arms in air
As their feet twinkle; they recede, and now
Bending within each others's atmosphere,
Kindle invisibly—and as they glow,
Like *moths by light attracted and repelled*
Oft to their bright destruction come and go....."
" .....the fiery band which held
Their natures, snaps—while the shock 'still may tingle;
One falls and then another in the path
Senseless—nor is the dissolution single,
Yet ere I can say where—the *chariot path*
Passed over them."

Thus even where his profoundest convictions were concerned Shelley was indebted, for his symbols and imagery, to Indian rites and customs as represented in the *Curse of Kehama*.

Conclusion

A careful study of the letters of Shelley clearly proves that the poet was, from his early youth, profoundly impressed by Indian ideas and Indian themes. His admiration for novels and romances like the " The Missionary " or " The Empire of the Nairs," his enquiries regarding Robertson's " Historical Disquisition on India " and Moore's " Hindu Pantheon,"* his borrowings, conscious or unconscious, from Southey's *Curse of Kehama* and Sir William Jones's *Palace of Fortune*—all testify to his growing interest in Indian life and thought. His references in *Alastor* and *Prometheus Unbound* to Indian scenes and his endeavour to create, in his latest drama, an atmosphere which he regarded to be Indian, plainly show that this interest grew with the development of his mind.

* Shelley, Letter to Hookham (December 17, 1812). *Vide* Dowden, Life of Shelley (Vol. I, p. 336).

The peculiar circumstances of his life and his pre-occupation with other interests, both social and political, prevented him from coming into direct and intimate contact with that world which exercised throughout his life such a strange influence on his imaginative temperament. His knowledge of this world was mainly derived from works which professed to depict Indian life and thought but which, owing to the ignorance of their authors, failed to give an accurate account of what they sought to describe. The Nair ladies, for instance, in Sir James Lawrence's romance, are philosophical dames who glibly discuss social problems. The atmosphere which he depicts is that of an eighteenth century *salon* and his characters remind us of Lady Mary Wortely Montague or Mary Wollstonecraft. Inspite of long descriptions of Mount Meru, Swerga or the car-festival of Jagannath, which we find interspersed in Southey's *Curse of Kehama*, a cursory perusal of the poem itself reveals the fact that the manners and customs, the rites and ceremonials depicted therein have no life about them. They do not ring true. On the contrary, they are, more often than not, ignorant misinterpretations of Indian life and Indian ideals. Even the laborious studies of Southey did not enable him to enter into the spirit of the world which he professed to represent in his poem and his image of the seven-headed Jaga-Naut unheard of in Hindu mythology is a typical instance of his ignorance.

It was only when Shelley came to study the works of Sir William Jones that he could come into contact with a world which represented with some accuracy at least, Indian beliefs and ideals; and this world of Hindu thought was revealed to him at a very significant stage in the development of his mind. Under the influence of Plato the poet had already begun to regard the external world of sense as " shadows " floating over " Eternity's vale." He had already become conscious of the eternal flux of things and the comparative unreality of human life and the external universe when the philosophical disquisitions and the oriental hymns of Sir William Jones painted before his mind's eye a world in which the " crystal vault," the " elemental fires," the " tossing main " were

all " delusive pictures " and " unsubstantial shows." It was only natural that such a system of thought so congenial to his extremely idealistic temperament should influence Shelley profoundly and urge him on towards a conception of life where " nothing is but all things seem." This world of " bubbles " and " dreams," of "visions " and "mimicries" is far removed from the world of either Plato or Berkeley. It is a Shelleyan version of the Hindu ideas of " Māyā " or " delusion."

The symbols and images through which the poet seeks to express his idea of the external world are, more or less, influenced by Indian thought. The chariot of life which he describes in his *Triumph of Life* is an adaptation, concious or unconscious, of the car of Jaga-Naut, which figures so prominently in Southey's *Curse of Kehama*. The conception that mountains, seas, waves, clouds and even light and life itself are a veil which conceals reality and reveals the inner truth only when rent asunder at the time of the redemption of man, reminds us of the world of Hindu thought as revealed by Sir William Jones in his hymns to Bhavānī and Nārāyaṇa. The representation, as early as 1814, of the Spirit of Necessity as a power, the " mother of the universe " sharply differentiated as it is from the Godwinian law of Necessity is very strongly reminiscent of Prakriti, Māyā, the Sakti, who, in the hymns to Bhavānī of Jones, weaves with sunbeams the mystic veil of the external world. The quiescent Prometheus and the ever-active Asia have on them the impress of the Hindu conception of Iswara and his Sakti. The uncompromising monism which Shelley sought to develop during the latter part of his life, so reminiscent of Upanishadic ideas and imagery clearly indicates that the poet had, under the influence of Hindu thoughts and Hindu ideals deviated from his erstwhile teachers Plato and Berkeley. The conception of the external world of reality as a chimera, a vision, a bubble is entirely different from Platonic philosophy and Berkeleyan idealism and the development of this idea in close connection with the peculiarly Indian

atmosphere of his unfinished drama, the latest of his literary productions, is a significant proof of the source from which he drew his philosophical ideals during the latter part of his life.

V

SHELLEY AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

Pre-Revolutionary France.

Shelley has often been regarded as a dreamy idealist living in a world of his own, completely isolated from reality—an ineffectual angel peopling the universe with the beautiful creatures of his fancy but making no appreciable contribution to the future progress of man.

A careful study of his literary compositions, however, completely disproves such an erroneous view of his character. He was never isolated from contemporary movements of thought and action. On the contrary, he always took a deep interest in the events of his age and his mind eagerly responded to its ideas and aspirations.

Like his fellow-believers in the perfection of man, he was deeply impressed by the revolutionary thought which was then sweeping over Europe; and though he was not a contemporary of the French Revolution, it strongly fascinated his imagination. He had, very early in life, imbibed, through the works of Godwin, Voltaire, D'Holbach and other writers of that age. the main theories of this particular school of thought. In his poems and prose writings we always come across echoes of revolutionary ideas; but apart from the ideology of the movement, the concrete events themselves were not without their influence on the mind of the poet; and strange as it may seem, he not only wanted to visualise them through his imagination but sought to analyse their causes and effects in the light of his intellect. For several years of his youth, Shelley was haunted by the idea of exhibiting " the causes of the failure of the French Revolution and the state of morals and opinions in France during the latter part of its monarchy."* As early

* Shelley, Letter to Eliz. Hitchener (Jan. 2, 1812).

as 1812, the poet enthusiastically informed his newly found teacher, Godwin, that he was deeply engaged in " An enquiry into the causes of the failure of the French Revolution to benefit mankind " *—an enquiry, the result of which never saw the light.

Poet though he was, Shelley had remarkably accurate knowledge of the condition of France at that critical period of her history. He had, says Mary Shelley,† very attentively studied the writings of the philosophers and historians of France and consequently acquired a thorough mastery over the details of the movement. He was fully conscious of the miserable condition of the French peasants, of the " pining famine, and the shelterless destitution of the inhabitants of that unfortunate country." He described in feeling terms how "the feudal system, both in the church and in the state, the immediate causes and conditions of its institutions being obliterated, had degenerated into an instrument, not only of oppression but of contumely, and both were unsparingly inflicted." ‡

In *Queen Mab* and other poetical compositions of his earlier life, Shelley did not indeed directly refer to the political, social or religious condition of France on the eve of its greatest revolution. His general descriptions of human society were very largely coloured by the ideals and principles of Godwinian philosophy; yet in the midst of these descriptions we seem to hear echoes of the Revolution, the distant rumble of its excesses and the stifled cries of its victims. Shelley had, in his youth, been an enthusiastic student of Voltaire's *Dictionnaire Philosophique*;§ he had eagerly sought to acquaint himself with the storied wisdom of the *Encyclopædia*‖ and sincerely believed that he would render a distinct service to humanity by translating the *Systeme de la Nature* of D'Holbach.¶ The violent denunciations of Helvetius, the cynical raillery of Voltaire, the weighty arguments of the

* Shelley. Letter to Godwin (Jan. 10, 1812).
† Mary Shelley, Journal, noted by Dowden in his Life of Shelley.
‡ Shelley, A Philosophical View of Reform.
§—¶ Shelley, Letters.

Encyclopædia had, very early in life, made him acquainted with the miserable condition of France when she was passing through the most critical stage of her national existence. His imagination was profoundly influenced by these details of misery; they seemed to float before his mind's eye whenever he sought to depict, in his verses, the withering influence of despotism, religious, economic and political. The significant words, "*Ecrasez L'Infame*" from the correspondence of Voltaire, which introduce *Queen Mab* to its readers, the long quotations from *Systeme de la Nature* which the poet inserted in support of his atheistical views, all show that the main prepossession of his mind, during this particular period of his life, was the revolutionary world of France.

As early as 1811, he was so far influenced by the ideals and events of the French Revolution that he felt the glow of enthusiasm, which characterised its leaders. His admiration for their principles, their audacious courage and undaunted determination was so great that whenever he sought to depict the *beau ideal* of patriotism he was at once reminded of these stern idealists; of the warrior who, to quote his words,

> " .....his country defending,
> Dares fearless the dark-rolling battle to pour."

He was fascinated even by the excesses of the movement and often would seek to celebrate how

> " O'er the pale corpse of a dead tyrant bending
> ... ...
> .....patriotism, red with his guilt-seeking gore
> Plants liberty's flag on the slave-peopled shore
> With victory's cry, with the shout of the free."*

* Shelley, Letter to Hogg (Jan. 6, 1811). It is, however, very strange to find Shelley celebrating these sanguinary excesses of revolutionary frenzy. His mind had not, as yet, reached the full maturity of its powers. His indignation at the tyranny of Aristocracy and Monarchy seems to have carried him off his feet and made him burst into ecstasies of unholy joy which, at a later age, he himself would have deprecated.

Even then, *La Marseillaise* which had inspired thousands of enthusiasts not only in France but in other countries of Europe as well, found an echo in the poet's heart. The unprecedented magnificence of the Regent's court disgusted Shelley, and it is very significant that his protest took the form, not of an outburst of individual inspiration but of the challenging words of that revolutionary anthem :—

'Tremble, kings despised of man,
Ye traitors to your country!
Tremble! your parricidal plan
At length shall meet its destiny;
We all are soldiers fit to fight,
But if we sink in glory's night,
Our mother earth will give ye new,
The brilliant pathway to pursue,
Which leads to death or victory." *

The dominance of the Revolutionary movement over the personality of Shelley was so complete at this stage of his mental development that under its influence he was encouraged to revolt even against Godwin whom he then regarded as the infallible guide of his opinions. He had read Abbè Barruel's *Memoirs of Jacobinism* and had been captivated by its descriptions of revolutionary societies in France. He had fully noticed how they, in that particular age, acquired a dominating influence over the minds of men; how the Jacobin and other societies established branches all over the country and, through them, effectively controlled public opinion. He had further observed how efficiently they made their views accepted by an unwilling assembly.† Carried away by the brilliance of their success and as yet unconscious of their terrible potency for evil, the poet became fully convinced of the necessity of similar institutions for England;

* Shelley, Letter to Hogg (apparently after June 19, 1811).
† Thiers, French Revolution.

and, in direct opposition to the views of his master, he recommended the establishment of similar societies in the different parts of his native country, especially for " the enlightened and unprejudiced members of the community whose independent principles expose them to evils which may thus be alleviated." Shelley was sure that no one can " bear in mind the very great influence which, some years since, was gained by Illuminism without considering that a society of equal extent might establish national liberty on as firm a basis as that which would have supported the visionary schemes of a completely equalised community." * The social, political and economic condition of France at the time of the Revolution had already attracted the attention of the poet and the opinions he advanced with regard to these questions were remarkable for the manner in which they gave an authentic picture of French society.

Feudalism had broken down in France by the persistent efforts of a succession of able monarchs. The nobles who had, in earlier ages, deprived the common people of the last vestiges of power were, in their turn, stripped of all authority. " During centuries of continuous efforts, the kings of France were battering down the Feudal edifice and at length they established themselves on its ruins, having, step by step, usurped the fiefs, subdued the vassals, suppressed the Parliaments of Barons, annulled and subjected the manorial courts and assumed the legislative power." †

Equally defective was the economic organisation of the country. Unjust laws, a pampered nobility, a peasantry crushed under the burden of taxation, lands lying fallow for want of cultivation ‡ and the king squandering the revenue wrung from his famished subjects upon his favourites and parasites—that was the *Ancien Régime*, the days of chivalry so celebrated by Burke. Privilege ruled everything; individuals, classes, cities, provinces and even trades. Individual

* Shelley, Letter to Leigh Hunt (March 2, 1811).
† Mignet, French Revolution.
‡ Arthur Young, Travels in France.

efforts and individual genius were hedged round in every direction; they received no encouragement or even recognition from the social system as it then existed. "Civil, ecclesiastical and military dignities were exclusively restricted to certain classes, and in those classes, to certain individuals."*

The greater portion of the public domain belonged to the nobility and the clergy, yet they were exempt from taxation of every kind. The common people who possessed about a third of the lands had to bear the entire burden of taxes. They were, further, required "to pay a multitude of Feudal rights to the Nobility and tithes to the Clergy."* All duties on articles also fell on them; and these taxes being farmed out to collectors, they tried every coercive measure to aggrandise themselves at the expense of the tax-payers. "Tax-gathering was nothing but an organised warfare; it caused an army of two hundred thousand drones to oppress the soil. Those locusts devoured, wasted everything."† The inevitable results followed. "Read the foreign travellers of the last two centuries," writes Michelet, "you behold them stupefied, when travelling through our plains, at their wretched appearance, at the sadness, the solitude, the miserable poverty, the dismal, naked and empty cottages and the starving ragged population." Citizens were more fortunate ; but yet, inspite of their enlightenment and industry, they were precluded from all those advantages which they had a right to enjoy.‡

The administration of justice left much to be desired. In the provinces, it had been entrusted to the gentry who always sided with their own class; while within the royal jurisdiction it was administered by magistrates. Offices in the judicial department were often purchased and went as often by favour. The king's mistresses would, on many occasions, exert their influence for bestowing judicial posts on their own favourites. No real justice could be expected from such people. Naturally it was slow, often partial, always ruinous and, above all, cruel

* Thiers, French Revolution. Young, Travels in France.
† Michelet, French Revolution.
‡ Thiers, French Revolution. Young, Travels in France.

in criminal prosecutions. "Interest was openly made with the judges and woe betide the man who, with a cause to support, had no means of conciliating favour, either by the beauty of a handsome wife or by other methods."*

Even religion, the last resource of man, had, for these poor people of France, become a tyranny more rigid than monarchy itself. Resting, as it did, upon mysteries and miracles, it could not tolerate new light and new knowledge. On the contrary, it thrust truth down to the second place and made Reason the handmaid of Superstition. The Church iu France thus became a retrogressive institution which was conservative enough to throw obstacles in the way of publishing Newton's discoveries and ideas; she violently protested against the Encyclopœdia and broke Calas on the wheel for being a Protestant. She had rendered herself all the more contemptible to right-thinking men by her petty jealousies and pitiable controversies on the most trifling points of dogma. Far from affording any consolation to the oppressed and the down-trodden, she almost always made common cause with the privileged classes and gave rise to well-merited reaction by " her besotted cruelty, her scandalous casuistry" and her rigorous intolerance.†

France had outgrown her political and religious systems. The growth of her national life was hindered, rather than strengthened, by the institutions which were, at that time, governing her with a firm hand. They were no longer the unifying bonds of the people but, like parasites, sought to stifle all national development. The reaction against these hide-bound institutions was not slow to appear. The intellectual advancement of the people made them alive to the realities of the situation. The strong leaven of independent thought increased every day and every hour. Young, the English writer, who happened to be present in Paris during the fateful years of the Revolution, was struck with astonishment at the incessent activities of the Press even when the movement

* Young, Travels in France.
† Morley, Voltaire.

was in progress. "The business going forward, at present, in the pamphlet shops of Paris," he pointed out, " is incredible. This spirit of reading political tracts, they say, is spreading into the provinces so that all the persons of France are equally employed. Nineteen-twentieths of these productions are in favour of liberty and commonly violent against the clergy and the nobility. It is easy to conceive the spirit that must thus be raised among the people."

In fact the entire social structure of France was tottering to its fall. Its injustice and iniquities, its intolerance of new light, its blind adherence to effete traditions, were all hastening to a total ruin. The miserable condition of France just on the eve of the Revolution could not but affect the poet deeply and it was only natural that when he sought to portray in *Queen Mab* the miserable plight of the poor and the oppressed, he should have in view the gaunt figures of the harassed French peasants; and the picture that he drew bore a wonderful resemblance to the condition of that unfortunate country.

Indignantly the poet sought to depict, in feeling terms, the misery of the common man

> " Whose life is misery, and fear and care;
> Whom the morn awakens but to fruitless toil;
> Who ever hears his famished offspring's scream,
> Whom their pale mother's uncomplaining gaze
> For ever meets, and the proud rich man's eye
> Flashing command, and the heart-breaking scene
> Of thousands like himself;" *

and we are at once reminded of the toiling masses of France—"certain wild animals, male and female, scattered over the fields, black, livid, all burnt by the sun, bound to the earth that they dig with unconquerable tenacity;" creatures who " have a sort of articulate speech, and when they rise on their

* Queen Mab, V, ll. 113-19.

feet, show a human face and are, in fact, men.'"* Like the common people of France during the *Ancien Régime* they must toil so that " few may know the cares and woes of sloth." They must compel the stubborn glebe to yield its unshared harvest; their squalid form must waste a sunless life and drag out a protracted death only to satisfy the greed and hunger of the rich.†

This type of social and economic injustice made a profound impression on Shelley even as it did on the Encyclopædists and philosophers of the French revolutionary movement; and like them the poet flared up with righteous indignation whenever he remembered the distressing spectacle of unmitigated poverty on the one hand and senseless extravagance on the other. His description of aristocrats was scathing in its sarcasm and bitter in its denunciation. They are

" .....gilded flies
That, basking in the sunshine of a court,
Fatten on its corruption!
.....The drones of the community; who feed
On the mechanic's labour;"‡

When we read these scathing lines of the poet we seem at once to see before our mind's eye the bejewelled and powdered nobles of the French court whose scandalous parasitism on the exhausted treasury of France, when revealed to the National Assembly through the famous Red Book, astounded all its members alike. Like the pampered nobility of France these parasites of the court

" .....heap
Toil and unvanquishable penury
On those who build their palaces and bring
Their daily bread;" §

* La Bruyère (quoted by Morley, Voltaire).
† *Cf.* Queen Mab, III, ll. 111 *et seq.*
‡ *Ibid.*, III, ll. 106-10.
§ Queen Mab, III, ll. 118-21.

They do not derive their power and position from nature, nor are their lives led in accordance with her virtuous dictates. On the contrary, they arise

> " .....from vice, black loathsome vice;
> From rapine, madness, treachery and wrong;
> From all that 'genders misery, and makes
> Of earth this thorny wilderness; from lust,
> Revenge and murder." *

Naturally such an order of society made the oppressed and down-trodden masses full of resentment and exasperation. They brooded, in the bitterness of their heart, on their miserable plight and nursed in secret, a passionate desire to wreak a terrible vengeance on their despotic rulers. The iron had entered their soul and their hatred was as quenchless as their wrongs were terrible. The brooding care of the masses in France, their indignation at the unjust tyranny of their rulers, their cynical disbelief in all promises of redress. were very realistically depicted in the picture that Shelley drew, of the submerged classes of society. Hardened by continual association with suffering, rendered desperate by widespread penury on all sides, the masses in *Queen Mab*, like their brethren in the *Faubourgs* of Paris, or in the blackened soil of the provinces " little heeded the rhetoric of tyranny " and laughed to scorn,

> " The vain and bitter mockery of words,
> Feeling the horror of the Tyrant's deeds,
> And unrestrained but by the arm of power
> That knows and dreads their enmity." †

They muttered their curses in secret and the day is not far distant, says the Prophet of *Queen Mab*, when kingly glare will lose all its power and Man will come to his own again.

* Queen Mab, III, ll. 121-25.
† *Ibid.*, V, ll. 122-25.

Equally conscious was Shelley of the maladministration of justice prevalent in those days, especially in France. The venality of the judges, their glaring partialities, roused the indignation of the poet. Such people, according to him, have no reverence for justice nor any sense of responsibility. They are more concerned with the technicalities of their profession than with the broader principles of equity. They

> " .....skilled *to snare*
> *The feet of justice* in the toils of law
> Stand, ready to oppress the weaker still."*

Like the magistrates and farmers of justice belonging to the *Ancient Régime*, the judges in *Queen Mab* do not stand on ceremony; their cynicism is unbounded

> " And right or wrong will vindicate for gold,
> Sneering at public virtue, which beneath
> Their pitiless tread lies torn and trampled, where
> Honour sits smiling at the sale of truth."†

The poet's attitude towards religion was considerably influenced by the thinkers of the revolutionary school. His satirical description of the central mystery of orthodox Christianity, his enunciation of the causes which contributed to its success are all reminiscent of Voltaire's *Dictionnaire Philosophique*.‡ Like his inspirer, he was bitter in his hostility towards the established religions of his own age. He described in lurid colours the pernicious effects of faith on the minds of men. Its shadow appeared to brood over the entire human race irrespective of class or nationality. It affected all alike, the tyrant and the slave, the oppressor and the oppressed. Its withering influence, like the withering influence of the Church in pre-revolutionary France, stunted

* Queen Mab, IV, ll. 196-98.
† *Ibid.*, V, ll. 200-03.
‡ Notes on Queen Mab, VII, ll. 135-136.

the growth of personality in man and extinguished the divine spark within his soul, yet such was the weakness of its votaries that in Argolis, the city of his imagination,

> " .....body and soul,
> Tyrant and slave, victim and torturer, bent
> Before one power to which supreme control
> Over their will, by their own weakness lent
> Made all its many names omnipotent
> All symbols of things evil, all divine."*

Such a system took away from its victims their zest in life. To persons, who had, from their childhood, been brought up on such ideals, the world appeared to be a vale of tears, a mere transition from one eternity of woe to another.

> " Well might men loathe their life, well might they turn
> Even to the ills again from which they sought
> Such refuge after death!"†

They were, consequently, reconciled to their lot, however unjust it might be. Their religion turned their attention away from the world to eternity. Their spirit, once broken by faith, could no longer struggle. " This vital world," "this home of happy beings" now appeared " as a dungeon " to the believers in orthodoxy; and their very faith taught them " to gaze on it with hopeless unconcern."‡

Thus

> " .....hymns of blood or mockery which rent
> The air from all its fanes, did intertwine
> Imposture's impious toil, round each discordant shrine."§

—a very truthful picture indeed of religious intolerance and absolutism which were crushing life out of France during the *Ancien Régime*.

* Revolt of Islam, II, viii.
†—‡ *Ibid.*, II, vii.
§ *Ibid.*, II, viii.

In the *Prometheus Unbound* again, the intolerance and tyranny of the Church are as intolerably denounced. One of the greatest tortures which rent asunder, as it were, the mighty soul of Prometheus, the Spirit of Humanity, is the vision of religious persecution. Christ, lamented Shelley, came to establish peace on earth and goodwill to man, but after his self-immolation on the Cross, his principles were "tortured."—

> "His words out-lived him like poison .
> Withering up Truth, Peace and Pity." *

To a poet who had been so nurtured, the portraiture of the church and the clergy as represented by Voltaire and other writers of the revolutionary school in France, had a very deep significance; and it was only natural that in his *Queen Mab*, priests should bear a very close resemblance to the Abbés of pre-revolutionary France. Like them, they were too worldly-minded to escape the contagion of the Court. Without any independent personality of their own, they were as servile as French noblemen. The slavish priest had little faith in his own religion; for his religion had no meaning either for himself or for others. It was a "Hireling Faith"

> "A little passing pomp, some servile souls,
> Whom cowardice itself might safely chain,
> Or the spare might of avarice could bribe
> To deck the triumph of their languid zeal." †

Nor did the poet forget the Bartholomew Massacres and the prominent part which priests took in them. He could not understand how they

> ".....dare babble of a God of peace,
> Even whilst their hands are red with guiltless blood,
> Murdering the while, uprooting every germ
> Of truth, exterminating, spoiling all.
> Making the earth a slaughter-house." ‡

* Act I, ll. 546 *et seq.*
† Queen Mab, V, ll. 200-3.
‡ *Ibid.*

In the *Revolt of Islam* again, we meet the same priest who pined " to wreak his vengeance on mankind." Hatred and guile combined to create of him a horrible creature, fearful even to his friends. He loathed and hated the clear light of wisdom and free thought and was always apprehensive lest, once kindled, its beams should pierce the gloom of ignorance and overthrow his idol. His mad zeal for the extinction of the infidels from the face of the earth, is not, however, typical of the ' French ' Abbé nor his unholy triumph in the tortures of the enemy. The French Abbé was too much of a rationalist and a cynic to be fanatical; too much of an epicure to feel strongly on any subject, be it religion or not.*

But the greatest evil from which France of the *Ancien Régime* had to suffer was its moral and spiritual degeneracy. Age-long tyranny and absolutism in the church and the state had stifled all human efforts and smothered the independent spirit of man. Men were no longer *men* but were vassals of their lords, serfs in their own country. They lost all initiative, all manhood. Society, consequently, presented the sorry spectacle of sycophants, sedulous of royal favour on the one hand and an inert, servile mass of common people on the other. The few thinkers like Voltaire, D'Holbach and others who stood boldly against tyranny of every type—social, intellectual or political—were exceptions, great men who, by their very independence, brought into vivid contrast the abject servility of the rest.

This condition has been very faithfully painted by Shelley in his *Revolt of Islam*. The land, says Laon of

> " The land in which I lived by a fell bane
> Was withered up. Tyrants dwelt side by side,
> And stabbed in our homes—until the chain

* X, xxx, xxxi. It is significant that this most intolerant priest was not a Frenchman but an Iberian. Shelley had, probably, in mind the Spanish Inquisition so far as these details of fanaticism are concerned.

Stifled the captive's cry, and to abide
That blasting curse men had no shame—all vied
In evil, slave and despot." *

Argolis, Centuries of despotism had broken the spirit of its inhabitants. They had often been excited by hopes of deliverance, only to be sorely disappointed in the end. And thus

" All that despair from hardened hope inherits
They sought, and, in their helpless misery, blind.
A deeper prison and heavier chains did find,
And stronger tyrants." †

The people now became " victims who worshipped ruin," " slaves who loathed their state," yet flattered power.‡

No less truthful to the state of Pre-revolutionary France was the terrible indictment which the poet put into the mouth of Laon, his Ideal Patriot—

" But from the sneers of men who had grown hoary
In shame and scorn, from groans of crowds made pale
By famine, from a mother's desolate wail
On her polluted child, from innocent blood
Poured on the earth, and brows anxious and pale
With the heart's warfare, did I gather food
To feed my many thoughts." §

The social inequalities, the abject economic condition of the populace, the oppression of the poor by the rich and vengeance brooding in silence—all show that whenever Shelley was trying to paint pictures of the social system of his age, he had always in his mind's eye, the France of the

* II, iv.
† II, vi.
‡ II, iii.
§ II, ix. The peculiar significance of the *Revolt of Islam* among the works of Shelley, his main preoccupation during this period of his life, the many coincidences between the *Revolt of Islam* and events in the history of revolutionary France, all point to the view that these descriptions must have had the French Revolution for their basis. The same may be said of similar descriptions in *Queen Mab*; *vide* sec. 5.

Ancien Régime. His Argolis was meant to be the Paris of the XVIIIth century.

Moreover, the intellectual ferment that characterised the age immediately preceding the French Revolution was fully recognised by the poet. "The new epoch," he pointed out, "was marked by the commencement of deeper enquiries in the points of human nature than are compatible with an unreserved belief in any of those popular mistakes upon which popular systems of faith.....with all their superstructure of political and religious tyranny are built."* The results of such enquiries, according to him, invariably led to the conclusion that many of the ideals and concepts which had, so long, been regarded as established truths and on which the prevailing systems of religion had been based are, at least, dubious, if not untrue. They clearly established "the certainty of our ignorance with respect to those obscure questions which, under the name of religious truths, have been the watchwords of contention and the symbols of unjust power."† The works of the revolutionary thinkers had a wide circulation, not only among the common people but among the aristocracy and nobility as well. They dissipated all obsolete and effete traditions and prepared the ground for more liberal principles. All classes of people, whether aware of the implications of their theories or not, eagerly listened to their verdicts on questions of moment.‡

Neither was this movement confined to the consideration of theological questions alone. Shelley was too intimately acquainted with the Encyclopædia to forget the important part it played in moulding public opinion on the social, economic and political problems of the day. While the philosophers were stripping the darkest mask from the face of tyranny by "developing those particular portions of the new philosophy which conduced to inferences at war with the dreadful oppression under which their country groaned," the political thinkers illustrated "with more or less success

*—‡ Shelley, A Philosophical View of Reform.

the principles of human nature as applied to man in political society." * Nor was the poet blind to the impetus that discussions of this nature gave to the dissemination of liberal ideas and revolutionary principles in the minds of the people at large. "A thirst," Shelley asserted, "for accommodating the existing forms according to which mankind are found divided, to those rules of freedom and equality which have been discovered as being the elementary principles according to which the happiness resulting from the social union ought to be produced and distributed, was kindled by these enquiries."* Everything thus became the object of research and reflection : governments, religions, laws, abuses. The nation was no longer inert; the strong public opinion which had thus been developed gradually became powerful and began to assume sovereign authority. The age of absolutism had passed away, never to return; the age of philosophy and liberalism had already arrived.* A new spirit was abroad —a spirit of enquiry and revolutionary ardour.

This newly found ferment and ardour reached its zenith during the early days of the French Revolution. The Palais Royal was the scene of constant gatherings. The clubs were filled with violent agitators who always inflamed the populace with their novel ideas and principles.† The tremendous intellectual activities which marked the French people during this critical period of their national existence were strangely reflected in the lives of the mythical inhabitants of Argolis. There also the doctrines of human power were scattered far and wide, from one extremity of the country to the other; there also men aspired to more than they had ever gained or ever lost. Like the French nation, the people of Argolis were all astir.

> "In secret chambers parents read, and weep,
> My writings to their babes, no longer blind;
> And young men gather when their tyrants sleep
> And vows of faith each to the other bind;

* Shelley, A Philosophical View of Reform.
† Young, Travels in France.

... ...

And every bosom thus is rapt and shook
Like Autumn's leaves in one swoln mountain-brook." *

So said Laon of Shelley's dream-city; so might also say the revolutionary thinkers of France.

2

The French Revolution—Its Significance.

The inner significance of the revolutionary movement was always clearly understood by the discerning intellect of the poet. He never forgot that it was, at bottom, a necessary protest against the out-worn mediæval principles which were, at that time, making an incongruous attempt to perpetuate their sway on a modern nation. It was, according to him, a conflict between mediævalism and modern ideals, a contest between darkness and light; an upheaval produced by " the defects of the correspondence between the knowledge existing in society and the improvement or gradual abolition of political institutions." † The autocracy from which the French had been suffering rendered them brutal, ignorant and servile, yet the light of new knowledge shone upon them as strongly as it did upon their more fortunate fellowmen. They had been bowed down to the dust by ages of uninterrupted despotism, " plundered and insulted by a succession of oligarchies each more bloodthirsty than the foregoing." They were " in the lowest state of human degradation " and suddenly light dawned on them. It was suddenly revealed to them that they were men and consequently equals. The oppressed thus " having had the intellectual thirst excited in them by the progress of civilisation, arose to take a dreadful revenge." ‡ Blinded by the glare of new ideals,

* Revolt of Islam, IV, xiii.
† Revolt of Islam, Preface.
‡ Shelley, A Philosophical View of Reform.

unable to restrain their passions, or direct their activities into useful channels of ordered progress, the newly emancipated masses of France made the world tremble.

Yet Shelley, unlike the English contemporaries of the French Revolution, was not overwhelmed by despondency. It could not rouse in his bosom, as it had done in others, any hopes unwarranted by the actual condition of things. He did not expect such a degree of unmingled good as it was impossible to realise.* He had, moreover, the advantage of dispassionately reviewing its entire history. Disappointed though he was in the results of the Revolution itself, the reaction in Shelley's mind was never so strong as it was in the case of Wordsworth, Coleridge or Southey. As he was not a contemporary of the Revolution he had not to pass through the Valley of Despair, nor was there, in his heart, any such struggle as we find in Wordsworth and Coleridge. He could, consequently, do greater justice to this much maligned movement in France.

The Revolution with its attendant horrors had blasted the hopes of many an ardent liberal. To Shelley, however, its true significance lay in its very failure.* It was a tragedy indeed.

> " Great France sprang forth,
> And seized, as if to break, the ponderous chains
> Which bind in woe the nations of the earth."†

And it appeared as if the Millennium was at hand, for

> " A disenchanted nation
> Springs like day from desolation,
> To truth its state is dedicate
> And freedom leads it forth her mate."‡

But the scene changed; soon its activities turned themselves into a fratricidal conflict, and that very same nation exhibited

* Revolt of Islam, Preface.
† Revolt of Islam, I, xxxix.
‡ Prometheus Unbound, I, 568-70.

the lamentable picture of strife in which kindred murdered kin and

> " Blood like new wine bubbles within
> Till despair smothers
> The struggling world which slaves and tyrants win." *

It was an " unquiet dream," an abnormal movement in which people lost sight of the normal value of things. Their vision was blurred by the passions of the moment; the accumulated wrongs of centuries had, so long, obstructed the onward rush of vengeance. Once liberated, the bitterness of ages came down like an avalanche and carried away reason, moderation, in fact everything, that fell in its way. Not only so, in the madness of popular frenzy, the principal actors of the movement, Shelley was acute enough to point out, mistook fear and pride, revenge and resentment for truth and reason.† And its career was as chequered as its course was tempestuous. When it first appeared

> " The nations thronged round, and cried aloud
> As with one voice, truth, liberty and love!"

Yet at a very early stage of its development,

> " Suddenly fierce confusion fell from heaven
> Among them: there was strife, deceit and fear;
> Tyrants rushed in, and did divide the spoil." ‡

Such conflicts, however, are, according to the poet, inevitable, especially

> " When free thoughts, like lightnings are alive,
> And in each bosom of the multitude
> Justice and Truth with Custom's hydra brood
> Wage silent war; when Priests and Kings dissemble
> In smiles or frowns their fierce disquietude." §

* Prometheus Unbound, I, 568-70.
† Rosalind and Helen, ll. 638-40.
‡ Prometheus Unbound, I, ll. 650-55.
§ Revolt of Islam, I, xxxiii.

Moreover, "if a just and necessary revolution could have been accomplished with as little expense of happiness and order in a country governed by despotic as in one governed by free laws, equality, liberty and justice would lose their chief recommendation and tyranny be divested of its most revolting attribute." * Tyranny and justice would, then, be no longer differentiated nor would the one be preferred to the other.

Again, if it "had been, in every respect, prosperous then misrule and superstition would have lost half their claims to our abhorrence, as fetters which the captive can unloose with the slightest motion of his fingers and which do not eat with poisonous rust into his soul." †

The excesses of the Revolution did not, therefore, frighten him away into apostacy. On the contrary, they afforded him the greatest justification for his social and political principles. They proved that man is the creature of circumstances, that social and political institutions mould his nature and that he can never escape the influence of his environments. For the poet could triumphantly point out that the excesses of the revolutionaries, their desire to wreak vengeance, " in itself, a mistake, a crime, a calamity, arose from the same source as their other miseries and errors." " Slavery and superstition, contumely and the tame endurance of contumely and the habits engendered, from generation to generation, out of this transmitted inheritance of wrong, created the thing which had extinguished what has been called the likeness of God in man." ‡ " Could they," the poet significantly asked, " listen to the plea of reason, who had groaned under the calamities of a social state, according to the provisions of which one man riots in luxury, whilst another famishes for want of bread?" For " can he who, the day before, was a trampled slave, suddenly become liberal-minded, forbearing and independent? " § It would, therefore, be sheer folly to assert that " whole generations of

* Shelley, A Philosophical View of Reform.
†—§ Shelley, Revolt of Islam, Preface.

mankind ought to consign themselves to a hopeless inheritance of ignorance and misery" simply because, " a nation of men who had been dupes and slaves for centuries were incapable of conducting themselves, with the wisdom and tranquillity of free men, as soon as *some* of their fetters were only *partially* loosened." *

The French Revolution had, thus, according to Shelley, a message for humanity : it warned them against sudden and premature upheavals; it counselled tolerance and restraint. This was however the negative side of the Revolution; it had its positive contributions as well. In spite of its excesses the movement was not an unmixed evil. The " enormous system of tyranny " which the revolution destroyed can never be resuscitated, nor can the abuses it swept away reappear. " The good the revolutionists did, live after them, their ills are interred with their bones." They " overthrew the hierarchy, the aristocracy and the monarchy and the whole of that peculiarly insolent and oppressive system on which they were based." Thus France was, as it were, regenerated. To sum up in the words of Shelley, " France occupies in this respect the same situation as was occupied by England at the restoration of Charles II. The authors of both the Revolutions proposed a greater and more glorious object than the degraded passions of their countrymen permitted them to attain. But in both cases abuses were abolished which never since have dared to show their face." †

3

The French Revolution—Its Hopes and Fears.

The poet was fully conscious of the violent alternations of hopes and fears which marked the progress of the revolutionary movement in France. Its ideals spread far and wide and inspired people with new aspirations. The first outburst of the French Revolution appeared to many as the dawn

* and † Shelley, A Philosophical View of Reform.

of the Millennium. In England the younger generation of poets and philosophers were carried away by ardour and enthusiasm. They seemed to discern in it a prologue to the great drama of human redemption. The earth seemed to wear the beauty of promise. If their sympathisers were thus "rapt away," the transports of the actual revolutionists were indescribable. "All men forgot themselves. The place, the strange place where the scene was passing seemed, at such moments, to forget itself. The Palais Royal was no longer the Palais Royal. Vice, in the grandeur of so sincere a passion, in the heat of the enthusiasm, became pure for an instant. The most degraded raised their heads and gazed at the sky; their past life, like a dream, was gone, at least for a day; they could not be virtuous, but they felt themselves heroic in the name of the liberties of the world! Friends of the people, brothers to one another, having no longer any selfish feeling but ready to spare everything."*

Soon however they, who had raised the whirlwind, could not control its impetuous progress. One by one, slowly but surely, the leaders fell victims to the popular fury they had excited. They died without trembling, only a bitter smile flickered on their lips as they remembered the sad contrast between their vision and the actual reality. The disillusionment of these martyrs was complete. Madame Roland died with unshaken resolution; she bowed down to the statue of liberty and exclaimed in the anguish of her heart, "Oh liberty! what crimes are committed in thy name."† Desmoulins raised his voice in protest against the terrible happenings of the revolution and suffered the extreme penalty of death for his audacity; at the time of his execution his only regret was that he had not "assisted the victims of the Terror."† Danton, the Tribune of the People, disgusted with the later developments of the Terror, lost all interest in life. With an audacity peculiar to himself, he boldly confronted his accusers. "I have already told you," he exclaimed

* Michelet, French Revolution.

† Thiers, French Revolution.

" that nothingness will be soon my asylum. Life is a burden ; take it from me, I beg to be delivered from it." * There is a heart-rending pathos in such scenes; this world-weariness of the leaders of the Revolution cannot but leave a profound impression on our mind. Their proud spirit lay shattered, defeated by the inexorable law of circumstances. They passed away, slowly and sadly yet without any complaint, into nothingness and oblivion.

Equally poignant was the disillusionment which awaited the ardent admirers of the Revolution in England. They who expected a Millennium of peace and goodwill, recoiled with horror from the spectacle of bloodshed which disgraced the course of the revolution in France. Their spiritual crisis was extreme. Their faith in the innate goodness and dignity of man as man was shaken to its very roots. Their dreams were shattered; their visions melted away like the mist of a summer morning.

Being an ardent student of the Revolution, Shelley appreciated this psychological background of the movement. He had studied its history and could, consequently, form a very accurate idea of the passions then swaying the minds of men. Accordingly the people of Argolis,† like the citizens of Paris

> " .....heard the startling cry,
> Like Earth's own voice lifted unconquerably
> To all her children, the unbounded mirth,
> The glorious joy of thy name—Liberty! " ‡

Like them again, the hearts of these people were lifted up in joy;

> " So from that cry over the boundless hills
> Sudden was caught one universal sound,
> Like a volcano's voice, whose thunder fills

* Thiers, French Revolution.
† Revolt of Islam.
‡ Revolt of Islam, IX, iii, iv.

Remotest skies. Such *glorious madness* found
A path through human hearts, with stream which drowned
Its struggling fears and cares, dark Custom's brood." *

They were transported beyond themselves, beyond their petty cares and anxieties, into a world of idealism which purified and exalted their souls.

" They knew not whence it came, but felt around
A wide contagion poured—they called aloud
On liberty—that name lived on the sunny flood." *

This widespread enthusiasm infected all liberal-minded people. Their joy at what they considered to be the approach of the Millennium was beyond all measure. " The most generous and amiable natures participated most intensively in these sympathies." Even scions of noble families like Lionel and Shelley were profoundly moved.

" When Liberty's dear pœan fell
'Mid murderous howls, to Lionel
Though of great wealth and lineage high
Yet, through the dungeon walls, there came
Thy thrilling light, O Liberty! " †

And its effect was instantaneous. The reformer had, so long, been struggling with his uncongenial environments, dreaming dreams and seeing visions which, he thought, were not to be fulfilled in his life-time. This conflict between absolutism and liberty, between mediæval ideals and modern principles, now, filled him with new aspirations.

' And as the meteor's midnight flame
Startles the dreamer, sunlike truth
Flashed on his visionary youth
Filled him, not with love, but faith
And hope and courage, mute in death." ‡

* Revolt of Islam, IX, iii, iv.
† Rosalind and Helen, ll. 612-16.
‡ *Ibid.*, ll. 617-20.

Such was indeed the ardour which welcomed the French Revolution in Europe. When France sprang forth and sought to break the ponderous chains of tyranny, when she strove to free nations from the stifling grip of absolutism, the Revolutionary thinkers were carried away beyond themselves by their fervent hopes,

> " And to the clouds and waves in *tameless gladness*
> Shrieked until they caught immeasurable mirth
> And laughed in light and music." *

It seemed to be the messenger of the Human Millennium unmistakably pointing out the way towards the attainment of human perfection. " The old order must change," cried these enthusiastic supporters of the revolutionary creed,

> " It shall be thus no more! too long, too long
> Sons of the glorious dead, have ye lain bound
> In darkness and in ruin." †

Hope had become strong. Justice and truth had arisen from their stupor of centuries and soon the thrones of the oppressors would be destroyed, and the altars of intolerance lie smouldering in ruins. Well might Laon's heart rejoice, well might it beat loud and fast in response to the surging emotions of the day.‡

Soon, however, the days of public rejoicings were past. Times were altered. The dreams and visions which had inspired the friends of freedom faded into nothingness, blurred by the contending passions of the moment. Men were again deceived by words and shows. Faith regained her supremacy over the human mind and people cowered at the slightest frown of their oppressors. The outworn creed which had been

* Revolt of Islam, I, xxxix.
† *Ibid.*, II, xiii.
‡ *Ibid.*, II, xii.

superseded became stronger and a blight seemed to fall upon humanity at large—

> " Many then wept, not tears but gall
> Within their hearts, like drops which fall
> Wasting the fountain-stone away." *

Even Lionel withered away; misery lay like a pestilence on his soul. He was stricken deep with despair and sorrow overwhelmed his proud spirit.†

In the *Revolt of Islam* also Laon fell on evil days and evil tongues; but unlike Lionel, unlike all English supporters of revolutionary principles, his spirit was not broken. Neither sorrow nor defeat could stifle his noble aspirations. On the contrary, each failure seemed to strengthen his convictions. Encompassed round by dangers, threatened by the direst punishments, he, like the heroic victims of the Revolutionary Terror, like Danton, Desmoulins and Madame Roland, faced death with a smiling countenance.‡

Neither Lionel nor Laon lost faith in the ideals of his youth. Failures could not unnerve them nor could the apparent insufficiency of their principles shake their convictions. They were no apostates, nor did they seek to justify their apostacy by violent denunciation of their former opinions. For Shelley could not understand Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey. To him, they appeared as " most ardent and tender-hearted worshippers of the public good," indeed; but worshippers sorely deluded by their early disappointments. They seemed to have been ruined by " what a partial glimpse of the events they deplored appeared to show as the melancholy desolation of all their hopes." § And Shelley lamented very pathetically the change which had come over their opinions. He mourned that Wordsworth who had shone as a lone star guiding shipwrecked mariners to

* Rosalind and Helen, ll. 721-23.
† *Ibid.*, ll. 691, *et seq.*
‡ Revolt of Islam, XI, xiv.
§ *Ibid.*, Preface.

their port, and stood like a rock-built refuge above the blind and battling multitude, should, all at once, fall back to the rear. "In honoured poverty," exclaimed Shelley in the anguish of his heart,

> "In honoured poverty thy voice did weave
> Songs consecrate to truth and liberty,—
> Deserting these, thou leavest me to grieve
> Thus having been, that thou shouldst cease to be." *

This enthusiastic admirer of the French Revolution, however, refused to despair. The earth might become the garbage of tyrants, all efforts for the redemption of man might fail, yet he would not "steep his hearth" in tears. For however successful and triumphant the forces of Misrule might appear to be for the present, their triumph could not last long. They were bound to fail in the long run, defeated and humbled by the powers of good.†

4

The Revolution—Its Personalities.

Shelley did not directly embody, in his poems, any of the outstanding personalities connected with the revolutionary movement in France. When he described how women took a very prominent part in the Revolution of Argolis he might have had before his mind's eye, Madame Roland or Madame Desmoulins. When he narrated how they would often participate in the heroic deeds of the awakened metropolis,‡ he might have based his descriptions on the activities of those French women who inspired their husbands, friends and relatives by their presence in the tumults of Paris.

* To Wordsworth (1816).
† Revolt of Islam, I, xxxv.
‡ *Ibid.*, IV, xx-xxii.

Of all the characters of the French Revolution, Charlotte Corday made the profoundest impression on the poet. Her unselfish nature and her enthusiastic devotion to the cause of liberty could not but inspire him with an ardent faith in revolutionary principles. Her life was unblemished and her mind was active and restless. She left her father's house to participate, with greater freedom, in the revolutionary movement. Youthful though she was, she exerted herself in its cause and became intoxicated with the idea of a republic properly constituted. The excesses of the revolution seemed to shatter all her youthful visions and she wrote to her father that as the troubles of France were daily growing more and more frightful, she wanted to seek quiet and safety in England. But this was a mere pretext. Determined to carry out what she considered to be her mission in life this brave maiden deliberately went to Marat's house, "calm as an angel in the dragon's den" and there "braved death for liberty and truth" by removing that execrable monster from the world.

Very early in life Shelley had been weighed down by "the woes of lost mankind" and "the ceaseless rage of kings." His mind dwelt on the miseries of oppressed nations when they groaned under the "fell and wild misrule" of their tyrants. And one of the most prominent figures which floated before his imagination to offer him solace in the midst of his despairing thoughts was that of Charlotte Corday.

> ".....Fairer than the spirits of the air
> More graceful than the Sylph of symmetry
> Than the enthusiast's fancied love more fair;"

it brightened with its radiance the visionary moments in the life of the weary poet. She was one of that "heavenly band" who "enthroned in roseate light" "strewed flowers of bliss that never fade away." And in lines instinct with the

admiration of youth, Shelley celebrated the daring which enabled " this loved glory of her sex " to tear

" From its base shrine a despot's haughty soul
To laugh at sorrow in secure despair,
To mock, with smiles, life's lingering control,
And triumph mid the griefs that round her fate
did roll."*

The shadow of her personality brooded over many a character of Shelley's poetical compositions. She transformed with her hues heroines of his imagination and we seem to catch her accents when the lady in the *Revolt of Islam* exulted in her activities—

" How to that vast and peopled city led,
Which was a field of holy warfare then,
I walked among the dying and the dead
And shared in fearless deeds with evil men
Calm as an angel in the dragon's den—
How I braved death for liberty and truth,
And spurned at peace, and power, and fame—and when
Those hopes had lost the glory of their youth
How sadly I returned—" †

Such stray hints are interspersed throughout his poems but there is no consistent attempt at idealising the portraits of the revolutionary leaders of France. On the contrary, his characters were of a different type altogether. He appeared to have used an indirect method of criticism. He did not

* Fragments of Margaret Nicholson, Epithalamium of Francis Ravaillac and Charlotte Corday. The very tone of this poem shows that Shelley had not, as yet, been able to rise above the puerilities of his early youth. Its absolute want of good taste strangely contrasts with the general trend of his poetry. Its wild enthusiasm for revolutionary excesses is at complete variance with the atmosphere of thought even in his earliest prose works. Here certainly Shelley the Child was speaking not Shelley the Enthusiast, far less Shelley the Thinker.

† Revolt of Islam, xliv. *Cf.* Thiers—French Revolution.

denounce the revolutionary leaders outright, but went to work more subtly, bringing out their defects and inconsistencies by contrast and comparison with the ideal beings of his own creation.

In Lionel of *Rosalind and Helen* Shelley sought to portray the character of such an ideal revolutionary thinker. Unlike the greatest protagonists of this movement, Lionel did not lose the balance of his mind even in the midst of unsettling incidents nor did he stand a silent spectator of such mighty happenings. His sympathy went out to the down-trodden and the oppressed; with an unflinching faith in the future redemption of man he

> " .....passed amid the strife of men,
> And stood at the throne of armed power
> Pleading for a world of woe;
> Secure as one on a rock-built tower
> O'er the wrecks which the surge trails to and fro
> 'Mid the passions wild of human kind
> He stood like a spirit calming them." *

He had the courage of a hero and the serenity of an angel. The pomp of power could not overwhelm him, nor could the passions of the moment carry him off his feet. Strong-minded and strong-willed, Lionel determined at the very outset the future course of his action; undeterred by adverse circumstances, or the tumultuous proceedings of the revolutionary movement itself, he clung to his path, irrespective of all consequences and did not swerve an inch from it. France, Shelley seemed to assert, needed the services of such strong-minded leaders, especially at that critical juncture of her national existence. They alone could restrain popular

* Rosalind and Helen, ll. 630-36.

frenzy and guide popular enthusiasm into channels of ordered progress. For their words alone

> " .....could bind
> Like music the lulled crowd and steer
> That torrent of unquiet dream,
> Which mortals, truth and reason deem
> But is revenge and fear and pride."*

Such another character was Laon of Argolis in the *Revolt of Islam*. Like Lionel his heart went out in sympathy to the poor and the oppressed multitude. He observed the abject servility of his countrymen, their superstitious terrors, their stifled aspirations and his spirit was weighed down with despondency. But he looked back upon the glorious past; and the " dwellings of a race of mightier men," and " monuments of less ungentle creeds,"† all told him in language which he could well interpret the history of his own country and filled his mind with new confidence and hope. " Such man has been," exclaimed Laon,

> " Such man has been, such may yet become!
> Aye, wiser, greater, gentler even than they
> Who, on the fragments of yon shattered dome
> Have stamped the sign of power."‡

Thus upheld in despair, he gradually became convinced that the system of society then prevalent, unjust and iniquitous as it was, could never last long. The suppressed masses were only biding their time and when the opportune moment would arrive, they were sure to rise to a man. The whirl-

* Rosalind and Helen, ll. 636-40.
† Revolt of Islam, II, xi.
‡ *Ibid.*, II, xii.

wind thus raised, would never stop at anything, it would break down all opposition, crush all impediments,

> " Scatter in its gust
> The thrones of the oppressor "

and destroy the altars of the tyrannical clergy. The ground would, then, hide the last vestiges of tyranny and absolutism and the idols which had so long been betraying the faith of humanity would vanish, never to reappear.*

So complete was his conversion to this new ideal that, all on a sudden, there arose in his mind a spontaneous desire to proclaim his new faith to all the world, an earnest resolution to rouse his fellowmen into consciousness of the realities of life.

> ".....I will arise and awaken
> The multitude and like a sulphurous hill,
> Which, on a sudden, from its snows has shaken
> The swoon of ages, it shall burst and fill
> The world with cleansing fire."†

Unlike the leaders of the Revolution, he was never carried away by the emotions of the moment. He never lost his mental balance. Calm and serene, he stood four-square to all the winds that blew. The mighty earthquake shook the superstructure of society to its very foundations, yet it could not touch him. He was unshaken and remained steadfast like " a tower whose marble walls the languid storms withstand."‡

When revenge and fear made the patriots lose their wonted composure, Laon, instead of swimming with the stream, stepped aside and restrained the frenzy of his excited followers. The fierce passions of the Revolutionary movement

* Revolt of Islam, II, xiii.
† *Ibid.*, II, xiv.
‡ *Ibid.*, II, xiv.

raged around him, yet he remained stern and unmoved like a rock. The waves tumultuously dashed against him only to return broken and frustrate. Unlike Danton, Robespierre and other leaders of revolutionary France, Laon did not participate in its excesses; he did not want to strike terror into the heart of his enemies. On the contrary, uninfluenced by the intoxication of violence which, time and again, infected his followers, this ideal leader of Shelley won his object of life, not by force of arms nor by terrible vengeance, but by love and sympathy.* Unlike the French Patriots he never sought "to high justice make her chosen sacrifice."† He would rather wish that

> ".....to the despair
> Of him whom late they cursed, a solace sweet
> His very victims brought—soft looks and speeches meet."‡

and never failed to impress upon his followers that

> ".....the chastened will
> Of virtue sees that justice is the light
> Of love nor revenge, and terror and despite."§

When occasion arose, this courageous leader of the revolutionary forces, did not shrink from placing himself in jeopardy for the safety of his own enemies.‖ It was not for nothing that Shelley had carefully studied the progress of the French Revolution and watched "the passions which rise and spread, and sink and change, amongst assembled multitudes of men."¶ The excesses of the terror had sunk deep into his sensitive mind. They did not indeed shake his belief in the innate goodness of human nature nor his firm conviction that the principles which seemed to be submerged by

* Revolt of Islam, V, ix, *et seq.*
† *Ibid.*, V, xxxii.
‡ *Ibid.*, V, xxxiv.
§ *Ibid.*, V, xxxiv.
‖ *Ibid.*, V, viii.
¶ *Ibid.*, Preface.

such tempestuous proceedings were sure to triumph in the end. They simply strengthened his innate reverence for non-violence, and increased his disgust for ill-regulated passions. The characters of Laon and Lionel were only the expression of this tendency in the poet's mind, his considered criticism of the Terror. And this criticism was all the more effective because it was so indirect and unobtrusive.

5

The French Revolution and the "Revolt of Islam."

Shelley had been, very early in life, attracted by the mighty events of the French Revolution. It was a movement "startling and vast" which, even after its apparent cessation, seemed according to him, to be simmering beneath the commonplace incidents of his age. It swiftly moved towards a drastic reconstruction of society according to liberal principles, and was fraught with much good and much evil for humanity at large. As such the poet never forgot the great significance of this enigma which had baffled most of his contemporaries. Already in 1812, the idea of exhibiting the manners and customs of pre-revolutionary France and the defects of the revolutionary movement itself, in the form of a tale, had taken possession of him. Its composition had compelled him to postpone the execution of *the poem* for which he had been preparing so long; and he waited eagerly for its completion in the near future.* From 1812 to 1817, the year when he wrote the *Revolt of Islam*, the one preoccupation of his mind was the French Revolution.† In 1817, " deeply moved by the misery of England, the feverish

* Shelley, Letter to Miss Lovel (Jan. 2, 1812), also Letter to Elizabeth Hitchener (Jan. 7, 1812).

† The frequent references to the French Revolution in his *Address to the Irish People* and his *Proposals for an Association*, support this view. His Preface to the *Revolt of Islam* has an illuminating analysis of the movement which is very significant.

hopes and fears of the people," " the triumph of reaction at home and abroad," the bitter persecution of liberal thinkers and the vindictive activities of triumphant Autocracy, this poet of the Revolution sought for a theme wherein he could unburden his mind to his contemporaries. He looked at the French Revolution and it seemed to give him ample materials for a prophetic vision. " He saw the terror, the despair, the apathy, the recoil, consequent on the violence and excesses in France; and seeing these and gazing into the past and the future he did not despair—he hoped. It was his desire to rekindle in men the aspiration towards a happier condition of moral and political society."* Not only so, he wanted further to place before his readers the horrors of a violent outburst of popular fury in all their nakedness; to depict the narrow egoisms, greeds and grosser passions of men which devastate society in times of crises; and to paint in vivid contrast the true ideals of a bloodless revolution inspired by the highest principles of justice and equity, uncontaminated by turbulent passions and bloody excesses. Out of the materials he had gathered by his critical study of the revolutionary movement in France, he created a visionary world of his own wherein he could fulfil his long-cherished desire of painting in bright colours his ideal of a silent yet swift national unheaval. And the result was the *Revolt of Islam*.

The *Revolt of Islam* marked, in fact, the highest point of the influence exercised by the French revolutionary movement on the mind of Shelley. Mary Shelley observed in her journal† that immediately before the composition of the poem the poet was, to all intents and purposes, immersed in the revolutionary literature of France. He read the history of that movement and was highly impressed by its magnitude and significance; and such studies certainly led him to depict, in the *Revolt of Islam* " a western nation " in the throes of a conflict between despotism and the modern ideals of freedom.

* Dowden, *Life of Shelley*.
† Mary's Journal, April, 1817. Quoted by Dowden (*Life of Shelley*).

" The Scene," the poet was careful to point out, " is supposed to be laid in Constantinople and Modern Greece but without any such attempt at minute delineation of Mahometan manners. It is, in fact, a tale illustrative of an *European nation, acted upon by the opinions* of what has been called (erroneously as I think) *the modern philosophy* and *contending with ancient notions* and the supposed advantage derived from them to those who support them."* " It is," he very significantly asserted, " a revolution of this kind that is the *beau ideal,* as it were, of the *French Revolution* but produced by the influence of individual genius and not out of general knowledge."*

Argolis is a city of Shelley's imagination, a place where the evil effects of age-long tyranny have stamped out, as it were, the divinity in man. The social and political injustices prevalent there,† the oppressions of the king, the nobles and the clergy,† the soul-killing atmosphere of its intellectual subservience† are all strongly reminiscent of Paris on the eve of the French Revolution. The intellectual ferment working among its people,‡ the violent alternations of their hopes and fears,§ their self-sacrifice and audacious courage also remind us of that storm-tost city in the midst of the greatest upheaval recorded in history. The very purpose for which the poem was written, *viz.*,—to illustrate "the progress of individual mind aspiring after excellence and devoted to the love of mankind," its impatience of oppressions, and as a result of its efforts " the awakening of an immense nation from their slavery to a true sense of moral dignity and freedom"—shows interesting points of resemblance with the tendencies of the revolutionary movement in France. Not only so, the most significant incidents of the French Revolution itself left such a great impression on the imaginative temperament of the poet that whenever he seeks to portray, in the *Revolt of Islam,* the causes of such an upheaval in the city of his imagination,

* Shelley, Letter to a Publisher (Oct. 13, 1817).
† Revolt of Islam, II.
‡ *Ibid.*, IV.
§ *Ibid.*, I.

his descriptions, consciously or unconsciously, seem to be coloured by episodes in the revolutionary movement. In fact the *Revolt of Islam* appears to satisfy all the conditions of a 'tale or poem' which the youthful enthusiast was eager to write "for the purpose of exhibiting the causes of the failure of the French Revolution."

The French Revolution was a contest between the obsolete ideals of absolutism and autocracy on the one hand and an earnest zeal for the attainment of freedom on the other. The entire French nation was, at that time, divided into two hostile parties—the aristocracy and the populace, the privileged few and the down-trodden many. The Aristocrats and the court beheld with dismay the mighty changes around them. The great movements of thought and action which stirred the people of France and expressed themselves in indelible letters on the pages of their national history only bewildered them. Neither the queen, the head of the Aristocratic party, nor her councillors could understand, far less appreciate, the tremendous events which were happening every day. The nation was traversing the track of centuries in as many years and naturally the nobles who still clung to the older ideals of feudalism could not keep pace with it. When they expected a revolt, they were confronted with a revolution.*

Gradually, however, the inner significance of the movement revealed itself to the privileged classes. They resisted and, when resistance seemed hopeless in the face of the universal enthusiasm then prevalent, these hardened diplomats, inured, for ages, to an atmosphere of intrigue, sought to regain by duplicity what they had lost by the stress of circumstances. They tried to inflame the Paris mob to orgies of excesses; they sought to buy off the more powerful leaders of the revolutionary movement itself; they appealed to the monarchs of Europe for succour and fomented civil war at home.†

* *Cf.* the answer of Duke de Liancourt to the king: "Sire it is not a revolt but a revolution."

† For details, *vide* Michelet, French Revolution; Thiers, History of the French Revolution.

Shelley was fully cognisant of these aspects of the French Revolution; and the consternation and dismay of the Aristocracy at the rising of the populace was very truthfully depicted in his *Revolt of Islam*. The tyrants of the golden city of Argolis, its ministers of fraud, its nobility and clergy, trembled at voices which were heard about the streets—voices of the awakened masses roused to a sense of their inherent rights and eager to overthrow all impediments in the way of their progress. They felt in their heart of hearts that the people were no longer blind but were fully alive to their own interest; that truth had illuminated their mind and dispelled ignorance therefrom. They could, consequently, scarce dissemble the lies of their own heart and even judges now grew pale in their judgment-seats.*

Equally conscious was he of the double game which the court played. Like Danton † and other leaders of the Revolution Shelley seemed to regard the king as responsible for all the intrigues of the court. The suspicions of the Republicans that even in his captivity the king was hatching plots‡ against the nation found an echo in his poem. The picture, that he painted, of the tyrant of Argolis was strangely similar to the Republican portraiture of King Louis XVI of France. This Tyrant, according to Shelley, was utterly callous to the sufferings of his people and spent his time in luxury and amusement. A weak and vacillating monarch, he cowered like a poltroon before the angry expostulations of his own subjects, but once relieved, relapsed to his own older self. A traitor to his country, he robed his countenance in lies and

> " .....—even at the hour
> When he was snatched from death, then o'er the globe
> With secret signs from many a mountain-tower,
> With smoke by day, and fire by night, the power
> Of kings and priests, those dark conspirators,
> He called." §

* Revolt of Islam, IV, xiv.
† Danton's Speech, Aug. 7, 1793 (*vide* Thiers, French Revolution).
‡ Charges against Louis XVI (*vide* Thiers, French Revolution).
§ Revolt of Islam, X, vii.

the appeals of the nobles of France did not go in vain. Prussia, Austria and Russia, though hostile in their varied interests and bitterly jealous of one another could not meekly accept the challenge of newly-awakened Democracy. They were apprehensive lest the ideals and principles advocated by the revolutionary thinkers of a neighbouring country should, in course of time, filter down to their own people and excite them with new hopes and aspirations. They who had, so long, been firmly established on traditions of absolutism, felt the impact of new ideas and seemed to become conscious of the coming danger. We are, consequently, confronted all on a sudden with the extraordinary spectacle of these great nations forgetting their ancient animosities and banding themselves together for the extinction of Republicanism in France, and the re-establishment, on its ruins, of the autocracy of the Bourbon line.*

What marks out the Revolution in Argolis as a counterpart of the Revolution in France, is the identical manner in which the Prussian and Russian monarchs are represented as coming to the rescue of its dethroned tyrant. They forgot their rivalries, " strange natures made a brotherhood of Ill," † and

> " *Teuton* and *Frank* and millions whom the wings
> Of Indian breezes lull, and many a band
> The *Arctic Anarch* sent, and Idumia's sand
> .....
> Fertile in prodigies and lies." ‡

They came rushing forth to overwhelm and crush the revolutionary forces by the very weight of their arms. The banded monarchs of the world were now determined to save themselves at all costs.

* Michelet, French Revolution.
† Revolt of Islam, X, vi.
‡ *Ibid.*, X, v and vi.

" And from the utmost realms of the earth came pouring
The banded slaves whom every despot sent
At that throned traitor's summons; like the roaring
Of fire, whose floods the wild deer circumvent
In the scorched pastures of the south; so bent
The armies of the leagued kings around
Their files of steel and flame;—*the continent*
Trembled as with a zone of ruin bound
Beneath their feet, *the sea shook with their Navies'* sound."*

—a very accurate picture, this, of the determined march of the mighty Austrian and Prussian hosts against the republican armies of France.

Like the ardent Republicans of those days, Shelley was vehement in his denunciation of these anti-revolutionary campaigns. Those who can fight against such a revolution are not men; they are mere

" .....multitude of moving heartless things
Whom slaves call men;"†

sheep who come obediently at the call of the shepherd to sacrifice their lives in the battlefield.

Not only were the frontiers of France thus jeopardised but her internal peace was rudely shaken. Compelled to resign their privileges, exposed, in almost all instances, to the fury of the multitude, the nobles had been nursing their resentment in secret. They secretly worked upon the credulity and sentiments of the ignorant peasantry who were still attached to the ancient traditions. In La Vendee and Brittany, the conservative people, unable to keep pace with the progress of the times and inflamed by the passionate remonstrances of those whom they had, for ages, regarded as their natural leaders and masters, revolted against the central authority. Meantime, the clergy, the majority of whom had, very early in the

* Revolt of Islam, X, iv. Does 'navies' here refer to the English?
† *Ibid.*, X, v.

Revolution, sided with the popular party, now made common cause with the nobility. They were scared away by reforms in the ecclesiastical administration of the country which were being introduced by the revolutionary party in France. Highly incensed at the steps which had been taken for the abolition of tithes and the confiscation of ecclesiastical property, indignant at the creation of constitutional priests and the insistence, by the state, on every clergyman's taking the oath of civism, the priests now tried all possible means for creating dissensions among the people. They preached violent sermons against the National Assembly and its supporters, threatened with excommunication and ultimate hell those who had received their sacraments from priests appointed by the state, misused their privilege of holding religious meetings in secret places and thus sought to rouse the whole country *en masse* against the new order of things.*

The results were deplorable. A civil war, remarkable for bitterness and cruelty, took place in two of the most important provinces of France. The entire countryside was devastated, cornfields burnt, homesteads destroyed and unbearable hardships inflicted on the people. Yet in the midst of such dire distress, Revolutionary France became victorious. The enthusiasm of its supporters and the heroism of its soldiers, made its arms triumphant over all obstacles. After anxious years of fratricidal war lingering wearily in the countryside, the followers of the disgruntled clergy and the suppressed nobility dwindled away and the revolutionary principles which had, slowly but surely, been establishing themselves among the people, were now based on foundations rendered more secure by their late struggles.†

In Argolis too, when the tyrant knew that his power was gone, he still waited patiently for a reaction in his favour. Even in the midst of his despair, when the entire atmosphere

* and † Thiers, History of the French Revolution.
Michelet, French Revolution.

seemed to be hostile to his own interests, he was often upheld by the faith

" That perfidy and custom, *gold* and *prayer*,
And whatsoe'er, when force is impotent,
To Fraud the sceptre of the world has lent,
Might, as he judged, confirm his failing sway." *

This hope gave him new vigour and new energy. It seemed to offer him a fresh opportunity for regaining his lost power and influence. And thus assured he sent, all over the city, priests to intimidate the so-called rebels with their curses and imprecations.

Accordingly,

" .....grave and hoary men were bribed to tell
From seats where law is made the slave of wrong,
How glorious Athens, in her splendour, fell
Because her sons were free."†

They laid special stress on the sacredness of the existing order of things and were never weary of pointing out the advantages of peace and tranquillity.

They preached,

" .....—that among
Mankind, the many to the few belong,
By Heaven, and Nature, and Necessity.
They said, that age was truth, and that the young
Marred with wild hopes the peace of slavery,
With which old times and men had quelled the vain and free." ‡

Even the theological argument was not absent :

" And with the falsehood of their poisonous lips
They breathed on the enduring memory
Of sages and bards, a brief eclipse." §

* Revolt of Islam, IX, xiii.
† and ‡ *Ibid.*, IX, xiv.
§ *Ibid.*, IX, xv.

They suggested that all who went against orthodox principles were false and pernicious. There was only one correct opinion, only one teacher whom men should follow; the rest were impostors sent to try the faith of human beings and lead them astray whenever opportunity occurred.

> " There was one teacher who necessity
> Had armed with strength and wrong against mankind
> His slave and his avenger aye to be." *

Men were no longer radiant with hope and joy; they had, no longer, any power to develop and perfect their latent faculties; nay more, they were not *meant* for perfection. But, on the contrary, they

> " .....were weak and sinful, frail and blind." †

The will alone, of the one great Preceptor, the Redeemer of Mankind, was one of peace and the common people

> " Should seek for nought on earth but toil and misery." ‡

for

> " Thus we might avoid the hell, hereafter." §

Meantime the entire world of thought had been transformed. These hypocritical priests might curse and lie; they might strive their utmost to rekindle fanaticism and superstition in the minds of their followers; yet they could make but little impression on the common people. For, unlike the French, the inhabitants of Shelley's ideal world, could, within a very short period of time, throw off the shackles of age-long superstitions and traditional beliefs. The French

*—‡ Revolt of Islam, IX, xv.
§ *Ibid.*, IX, xvi.

peasants might fear the curses of their priests; they might become inflamed with fanatic zeal by the exhortations of their spiritual guides. They might, as a consequence, rise to a man against the revolutionary régimé of their own land. But the masses of Shelley's Argolis were made of far other stuff. They remained unmoved. Once enlightened, they could, no longer, be slaves to orthodoxy. The appeals of the priests, consequently, sounded hollow to them. The priests felt that

> " .....their sway was past, and tears and laughter
> Clung to their hoary hair, withering the pride
> Which, in their hollow hearts, dared still abide."*

Although the tyrant of Argolis might, like the plotters of the counter-revolution in France, scatter money and promises indiscriminately among the people, yet all his endeavours to create dissensions in the rank of the revolutionary forces were fruitless.

> " And gold was scattered through the streets, and wine
> Flowed at a hundred feasts within the walls;"†

even as wine did flow in the parties which the Queen gave to welcome the officers loyal to the throne and the cause of Aristocracy. Yet all their efforts were unsuccessful.

> " In vain! the steady towers in heaven did shine
> As they were wont, nor at the priestly call
> Left Plague her banquet in the Ethiop's hall,
> Nor famine from the rich man's portal came."‡

The atmosphere was completely changed. The older traditions and ideals could no longer appeal to the imagination of the common people. Enlightened by their newly acquired knowledge and upheld by a sense of their own innate dignity

* Revolt of Islam, IX, xvi.
† and ‡ *Ibid.*, IX, xvii.

and worth, they no longer succumbed to temptations or the corruptive influences of greed and fanaticism.

> " .....Gold was as a god whose faith began
> To fade, so that its worshippers were few,
> And faith itself, which, in the heart of man
> Gives shape, voice, name, to spectral Terror, knew
> Its downfall. And the cold sneers of calumny were vain,
> The union of the Free with discord's brand to stain."*

The people of France were constantly alarmed by these plots of the nobles and the counter-propaganda of the clergy. At the very outset of the Revolution, the inhabitants of Paris found themselves besieged, as it were, by the powerful forces of the king. Unaccustomed to war and untaught in the mysteries of arms, they regarded themselves as helpless pawns who were completely at the mercy of the king and the nobles. News from abroad, of the emigration of the nobles to foreign countries, and their incitement of foreign monarchs to take up arms for the suppression of republicanism exasperated them all the more. Suspicions that the royalist forces were marching against them were, in their opinion, fully confirmed by the powers which were being lavishly bestowed upon their officers. Thus exasperated, thus bewildered, they resolved to arm themselves in self-defence. The cry " to arms, to arms," was, time and again, heard among the populace, as they congregated together in their meeting places. But their efforts for procuring arms were, at first, unsuccessful. Baffled in their attempts, the people became indignant and furious. They searched all possible places for weapons and threatened the municipal authorities of Paris with the direst consequences. Popular commotion reached its height and the authorities were finally intimidated into distributing 50,000 pikes among the citizens of Paris.†

* Revolt of Islam, IX, xviii.
† *Vide* Thiers, French Revolution.
Michelet, French Revolution.

This state of affairs was very significantly painted by Shelley in his *Revolt of Islam*, Cantos V and VI. The revolutionary forces of his Ideal City, however, did not forearm themselves. They did not become exasperated at mere rumours. Yet the same atmosphere of suspense and indecision was there. Even after the solemn acceptance of the great oath of fraternity, the city was shaken, as Paris was shaken after the first Federation, to its very basis by fears, vague and indefinite in their nature, regarding the future progress of the movement. The rejoicings of the triumphant people were suddenly smothered even at their very inception. Laon and his followers had just arrived at the gates of the city when

> " .....none knew whence or why
> Disquiet on the multitude did fall."*

Even as in Paris during the critical period of the Revolution, troops of wild-eyed women, infuriated and exasperated by the alleged cowardice of its leaders, would often burst into the National Assembly Hall itself, so also in Argolis, the City of Shelley's imagination, there passed by, at intervals,

> " A troop of wild-eyed women, by the shrieks
> Of their own terror driven,—tumultuously
> Hither and thither hurrying with pale cheeks," †

each one seeking a sudden refuge from an unknown fear.

The same suspicions excited the multitude—the fear of royalist forces, and of external invaders. The masses were carried away by panic and gave up, in their consternation, all thoughts of resistance and defence. Laon alone, in whom the poet sought to portray an ideal revolutionary leader,

* and † Revolt of Islam, VI, ii.

calm, collected and brave in the midst of the wildest commotions, was left to mourn.

" Then rallying cries of treason and of danger
Resounded: and—' They come! to arms! to arms!
The tyrant is amongst us, and the stranger
Comes to enslave us in his name! to arms! '
In vain: for Panic, the pale fiend who charms
Strength to forswear her right, those millions swept
Like waves before the tempest—these alarms
Came to me, as to know their cause I lept
On the gate's turret, and in rage and grief and scorn
I wept."*

Moreover the people of Argolis were not aggressive like the citizens of Paris. They never took arms except in self-defence, nor do we find in the entire history of its revolution any such outburst of popular fury as stained the glories of the French Revolution at almost every stage of its development. The Aristocrats of Argolis and their minions were the first to attack and in the vivid description that Shelley gave, of the first onset of anti-revolutionary forces, we get a glimpse, as it were, of what the patriots of France regarded to be the probable consequences of the machinations of the King and the Nobility. In the portrayal of these different scenes, Shelley seemed to visualise the fears and suspicions of popular leaders in Paris. In prophetic vision he seemed to look steadfastly on the conflagration which might, then, have spread over the entire city. He listened to the distant rumblings of the gathering storm, its yells of victory and screams of woe. He saw the people swept away, and winced at the fearful glow of bombs which flared overhead. Before his far-seeing poetic eye, " the terrible bolts " of the " red-artillery " fell upon the congregated masses of the people and mangled them beyond recognition. The cavalry swept over the plains, "their

* Revolt of Islam, VI, iii.

red swords flashing in the unrisen sun." In compact masses they moved along

> " And with loud laughter for their tyrant reap
> A harvest sown with other hopes." *

It was as if the entire French army with the aged Marshal at its head were sweeping through the *Champ de Mars*, carrying death and destruction wherever it went and crushing under the weight of its arms all popular efforts and all popular movements. The revolutionary forces were in immediate danger of annihilation ; and then alone did the people "feel the might of virtuous shame " and stand at bay inspired by the very hope which desperation breeds. At first they stood silent, disdainful of the wrongs inflicted upon them; trying to defeat the efforts of armed forces by the sheer weight of numbers and silently enduring all oppressions. .This picture of the passive resistance in Argolis was in direct contrast to the tumults and popular excesses of the Paris mobs. There were, among the citizens of this ideal state, a superhuman calmness and a superhuman spirit of endurance totally absent in the activities of the excited masses of Paris. But all the heroic fortitude of the people proved fruitless and finally the instinct of self-preservation triumphed. In a desperate moment, the multitude sought arms and found them. †

> " Within a cave upon the hill were found
> A bundle of rude *pikes*, the instrument
> Of those who war but on their native ground
> For natural rights; a shout of joyance sent
> Even from our hearts the wide air pierced and rent
> As those few arms the bravest and the best
> Seized and each sixth, thus armed, did now present
> A line which covered and sustained the rest,
> A confident phalanx, which the foe on every side invest." ‡

* Revolt of Islam, VI, iii.
† *Ibid.*, VI, ix-xii.
‡ *Ibid.*, VI, xiii.

It was not, however, conflicts of this nature which could, according to the poet, bring about the redemption of man. From his early life Shelley was averse to all forms of violence. He regarded it to be a hindrance rather than an aid to human progress. The only point which the youthful revolutionary reiterated, time and again, in his *Addresses to the Irish People* or his *Proposals for Associations of Philanthropists* was that reformers should, on no account, have recourse to force. According to him the best way to ensure the liberation of oppressed humanity is by developing amongst them a sense of fraternal sympathy. Man can become great not by destruction but by the reconstruction of human society on an entirely new basis of Love. This is the great principle which the poet vaguely suggested in *Queen Mab*. The future Millennium which he pictured before his prophetic imagination is one where " consentaneous love " binds all individuals into one great community.* Love inspires all great actions and redeems human nature from the pettinesses of everyday life ;† and the spirit of cosmic love alone, can bring about the regeneration of man.‡ It delivers humanity from the bondage of positive Institutions which have, for centuries, been suppressing its independent aspirations.

It was, therefore, only natural for him, to deliberately suggest throughout the *Revolt of Islam* the principle of non-resistance to evil. The popular forces meekly endured all hardships and all oppressions inflicted upon them by royalists and aristocrats. They did not wish to win by force of violence but by rational principles and the innate dignity of their actions. Thus did Laon restrain his followers from all popular excesses. Thus did Cythna strike pity and terror into the heart of her very enemies. Those aspects alone of the French Revolution, which lay special emphasis upon the fraternal nature of their movement, could have any significance for the mind of Shelley. Others might suggest to the poet details of

* Queen Mab, VIII, l. 107.
† Defence of Poetry.
‡ Prometheus Unbound.

episodes, hints for personalities, or general outlines of events but they did not give him enough materials for a sustained course of action. It was only the federation and similar activities of Revolutionary France that suggested to him principles according to which the future redemption of man might be brought about.

To counteract the organised efforts of the anti-revolutionary forces, there had been growing up in France, throughout the years 1789-90, a movement for holding revolutionary federations in the cities and the provinces. Unions were formed, groups rallied together and unitedly sought a common centralisation. People flocked together in their thousands and hundreds of thousands. They solemnly gathered in wide plains (*e.g.*, the plains of the Rhone) and there solemnly consummated their union. An immense movement for unity was set on foot. Differences were forgotten in the enthusiasm of the moment. Remote provinces and people still remoter in manners, customs and sentiments united together in the sacred cause of liberty, with the holy object of overcoming, by common efforts, the enemies of progress. One great ideal was actuating all, one great enthusiasm rapt them away. From every corner, France was hastening towards the centre; "union was gravitating towards unity."

It was under the influence of this great enthusiasm that the Municipality of Paris conceived the idea of celebrating, with adequate national solemnity, the anniversary of the destruction of the Bastille. The *Champ de Mars*, an extensive plain, was selected as the site for these national rejoicings. Twelve thousand workmen undertook to prepare it for the field of the Federation; but the entire population of Paris eagerly took up this work and assisted the labourers. Day and night, the whole plain resounded with the songs and revolutionary ditties enthusiastically sung by an entire nation at work. Schoolmasters and scholars, sisters of the religious orders and monks grown old in solitude quitted their cloisters to assemble at the *Champ de Mars*. The rich and the poor, the learned and the ignorant—all took part in this great national celebration. It was an extraordinary spectacle to behold—

both day and night, men of every class and every age—soldiers, abbés, monks, actors, nobles, ladies, marketwomen, day-labourers—all handling the pick-axe, rolling barrows or drawing carts: and such was their enthusiasm that this magnificent piece of work was performed within a week.

The day of Federation drew near. From the departments and the provinces federalists in orgained bands entered Paris singing, in triumphant notes, the songs of the Revolution, the *Ça ira* and other ditties. The entire *populaire* of Paris offered them a welcome which seldom falls to the lot of princes to receive. They féted them, and housed them in the most sumptuous manner possible. On the day of the Federation. the Federalists ranged by departments under eighty-three banners, set out in procession for the *Champ de Mars*. They were received by the acclamations of an immense populace who thronged the windows, the streets and quays. Unimpeded by torrents of rain, they, dancing in the enthusiasm of their heart, proceeded to the Federation ground where a vast crowd was already waiting for their arrival. In the *Champ de Mars* itself a grand sight awaited them—the sight (to quote a contemporary writer) of "men come from all parts of France, banishing all memory of the past, all thought of the present, and all apprehensions of the future and giving unrestrained loose to the gaiety of the moment; and of three hundred thousand spectators of every age and both sexes, following their motions with their eyes, beating time with their feet and forgetting the rain, hunger and the weariness of waiting so many hours."

"At last the procession entered the *Champ de Mars*: the dancing ceased, each federalist went to join his own banner. The Bishop of Autun proceeded to solemnise the Mass at an altar after the antique, placed in the midst of the *Champ de Mars*. Three hundred priests in white vestment, with broad tri-coloured ribands, arranged themselves round the four corners of the altar." Twelve hundred musicians sang the *Te Deum*. The king, the confederates, and the National Assembly, with all solemnity, took the civic oath which was responded to by the entire audience.

Curiously enough in Argolis, Shelley's dream-city, there existed a similar vast plain like the *Champ de Mars* and like the federalists of the French Revolution, the masses, fired with new hopes and aspirations hastened to the spot to strengthen their bonds of fraternity. Like the federalists again, the citizens of Argolis manifested their enthusiasm in song and dances and spent their time in the midst of these wide plains.

> " There was a vast plain beneath the city's walls
> Bounded by misty mountains, wide and vast
> Millions there lifted at freedom's thrilling call
> Ten thousand banners wide. They loaded the blast
> Which bears one sound of many voices past,
> And startled on his throne, their sceptred foe."*

In the midst of this wide expanse, thousands of willing hands erected with great energy an immense pile significantly called *the Altar of the Federation*. The way in which the entire people worked, the short time in which the edifice was reared, the very name itself—are all reminiscent of similar scenes in the French Revolution. It was a work

> " .....which the devotion
> Of *millions in one night* created there
> Sudden, as when the moon rises makes appear
> Strange clouds in the East; a marble pyramid
> Distinct with steps: that mighty shape did wear
> The light of genius; its still shadow hid
> Far ships: to know its height the morning mists forbid."†

The federalists of Argolis were as much intoxicated with joy and hope as those of Paris. With wild shouts of rejoicing, they marched forward in procession; forgetful of their past sorrows, their present misgivings and their gloomy forebodings; forgetful also of their dissensions and enmities—a

* Revolt of Islam, IV. xxv.
† *Ibid.*, V. xi.

nation united by liberty, a people glorified by freedom. "Lifting the thunder of their acclamation" even as the federalists of France did, they went forth in joy to the city

> "..... —a nation
> Made free by love; —a mighty brotherhood
> Linked by a jealous interchange of good;
> A glorious pageant, more magnificent
> Than kingly slaves arrayed in gold and blood."*

An equally joyous welcome awaited their arrival. The streets were packed with eager spectators and the town itself appeared to wear festive garments. Her walls were thronged, her turrets were overcrowded, and bright flags fluttered gaily to the breeze from every steeple and every vantage ground. And when they appeared

> "..... A shout of joyance sprung
> At once from all the crowd, as if the vast
> And peopled earth its boundless skies among
> The sudden clamour of delight had cast
> When from among its face some general wreck had passed."†

As they passed along the streets the enthusiasm of the citizens was all the more augmented at the sight of the gallant band of revolutionary leaders. When they proceeded through the calm, sunny air, thousands of flower-interwoven crowns were shed over them and all vied with one another to load them with gifts of flowers and garlands.‡

The great day arrived, the great day when, like the federalists of France, the mighty host which now congregated in the Plains of Argolis were to consecrate themselves to the cause of liberty and fraternity. Even as in the case of the Federation of Paris, it was solemnly proclaimed to the world

* Revolt of Islam, V, xiv.
† *Ibid.*, V, xv.
‡ *Ibid.*, V, xvi.

that the many nations at whose call the chains of the earth had suddenly melted away, should hold a sacred festival, a solemn rite to attest the equality of all who live.* The morning broke out not in wind and showers, but in one great burst of radiant sunrise. For in the land of Shelley's imagination, if not in Revolutionary France, " the weather ceased to be aristocratical " † and the earth seemed to wear the garment of promise.

" .....The eternal hills, and the sea lost
In wavering light, and, starring the blue sky
The city's myriad spires of gold, almost
With human joy made mute society." ‡

There was the same multitude round the base of the altar, flowing round its foundations even as " on some mountain-islet, burst and shiver, Atlantean waves ; " and although masses were not held nor *Te Deums sung* in this anti-Christian realm of Shelley's imagination yet the result of their exultations was borne far and wide by winds and a dream-like music swarmed

" Like beams through floating clouds on waves below
Falling in pauses, from that altar dim
As silver-sounding tongues breathed an aerial hymn." §

The entire concourse was transported beyond its narrow self

" To hear, to see, to live, was on that morn
Lethean joy ! so that all those assembled
Cast of their memories of the past out-worn." ‖

They forgot their petty jealousies, their transitory animosities, their bitter memories of the past and their anxious fears for the future. In the enthusiasm of the moment, in the exultation

* Revolt of Islam, V, xxxvii.
† Thiers, French Revolution, Appendix.
‡ Revolt of Islam, V, xxxix.
§ *Ibid.*, V, xli.
‖ *Ibid.*, V, xliii.

of their great ideal of fraternity, all individuality was lost, all differences forgotten and the entire people became strong by one great purpose, became united by one single vision.

The remaining part of that ceremony did not, however, conform, in the least, to that of the Federation in Paris. Profoundly influenced as he was by Voltaire's denunciation of orthodox Christianity, Shelley could not associate the activities of his ideal revolution with the liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church. The image of Reason* repressing "Faith an *obscure worm*," on the "Altar of Federation" is truly symbolical of the young poet's attitude towards the religion of his forefathers. It was, therefore, only natural that Shelley should proceed to picture before his imagination the rites celebrating the Redemption of Humanity in an altogether different manner. True to his exalted ideal of womanhood he represented that the united voice of nations proclaimed a woman, Laone, to be the priestess of these holiest ceremonies. She approached the symbolic altar and poured forth her heart in thrilling songs of liberty and equality.†

In the meantime the people, intoxicated with their new ideals, had already discovered their tyrant who had, so long, been living in melancholy silence in his gorgeous palace. He was astounded by the swift changes going on around him and troubled by the sudden withdrawal of all authority from his sceptre. He was bewildered and could not understand how even from gold

> "..... the dreadful strength was gone
> Which once made all things subject to its power."‡

Like the citizens of Paris, the inhabitants of Argolis also congregated in large numbers and invaded the king's palace—

* Revolt of Islam, V, xi.
† *Ibid*, V, xiii *et seq*.
‡ *Ibid*, V, xxviii.

" A mighty crowd, such as the wide land pours
Once in a thousand years, now gathered round
The fallen tyrant." *

The ideal revolutionists of Shelley's dreamland were, however, quite different in their opinions and activities, from the infuriated citizens of Revolutionary France. They determined to conquer not by force but by reason and love and were peaceful even in the presence of their oppressors. They did not indulge in any orgies of destruction nor did they strive to wreak a cruel and ineffectual vengeance on their fallen enemies. On the contrary, their proceedings were solemn and calm

" .....like the rush of showers
Of hail in spring, pattering along the ground,
Their many foot-steps fell, else came no sound
From the wide multitude." †

Not that they did not feel the oppression of centuries. They were as much incensed at the sight of their oppressor as their compatriots in France.

" Slowly the silence of the multitude
Passed, as when far is heard in some lone dell
The gathering of a wind among the woods—
' And he is fallen! ' they cry, ' he who did dwell
Like famine, or the plague, or aught more fell
Among our homes, is fallen!' The murderer
Who slaked his thirsting soul as from a well
Of blood and tears with ruin! he is here!
Sunk in a gulf of scorn from which none may him rear!" ‡

The awful cry of vengeance was also heard—that cry which carried away the bloodthirsty masses of France and stained the course of the Revolution with innocent blood. The

* Revolt of Islam, V, xxix.
† *Ibid.*, V, xxix.
‡ *Ibid.*, V, xxxi.

oppression of centuries had, so long, been stifling the spirit of man; its iron had already entered his soul. The resentment which had, for ages, been smouldering in secret, now burst into flame. The bitterness which had, all this time, been corroding the heart of the down-trodden people now made them mad with thoughts of revenge. "He who judged," cried the newly awakened nation,

> "....let him be brought
> To judgment! blood for blood cries from the soil
> On which his crimes deep pollution have brought." *

For,

> "Shall they who by the stress of grinding toil
> Wrest from the unwilling earth his luxuries
> Perish for crime while his foul blood may boil
> Or creep within his veins at will?" †

We seem to catch in these bitter denunciations the accents of the mob orators of the *Palais Royal*; the arguments and the sentiments are all the same. The same red glare of vengeance shines through them. And when in a paroxysm of rage the mob cry out

> "....Arise!
> And to high justice make her chosen sacrifice,"

we are at once reminded of Marat and his inhuman incitements, his furious denunciations, his terrible urgings for the extirpation of the aristocrats and their sympathisers. It was Paris that spoke—the Paris of Marat, Robespierre and the September Massacres and not Argolis.

Yet in the midst of these tumultuous proceedings there were men who did not lose their presence of mind—leaders who had the courage to face

* Revolt of Islam, V, xxxii.
† *Ibid.*, V. xxxii.

the multitude with counsels of moderation. Like that small band of much-maligned Moderatists who, even in the midst of universal popular resentment, had the audacity to strive for the safety of the unhappy king of France, there were, in Argolis also, persons like Laon who attempted to restrain popular frenzy when it was getting out of control. And well was it for the dream-city of Shelley that these moderatists were not swept away by the onrushing tide of mob-fury, as they were in Revolutionary France. We are, consequently, no longer confronted with the degrading spectacle of the maddened populace triumphing over the misfortunes of their fallen enemy, exulting over his misery and heaping upon him insults which were both unmerited and undignified. We are spared the disgusting scenes of an all-powerful state taking mean revenge on its king, exposing him to petty indignities, hurrying him unceremoniously to dungeons and insulting him even at the foot of the guillotine.

On the contrary, the expostulations and remonstrances of the leaders were successful; the ominous murmur of the people slowly died away and they who had erstwhile been muttering vows of revenge and retribution became now solicitous for the king's welfare.

> "..... to the despair
> Of him whom late they cursed, a solace sweet
> His very victims brought—soft looks and speeches meet."*

And

> "then to a home for his repose assigned
> Accompanied by the still throng he went
> In silence, where to sooth his rankling mind
> Some likeness of his ancient state was lent." †

How different from the French Revolution!

The victory of the people was, however, very short-lived in the republic of the poet's imagination. The democrat and revolutionary that Shelley was, he could not, in any

* Revolt of Islam, V, xxxv.
† *Ibid*, V, xxxvi.

way, celebrate the glorious exploits of the Napoleonic régime in France. To him, it was only an insignificant interlude between popular triumph and the final disaster. In 1816, just a year before the publication of the *Revolt of Islam*, he, in lines tingling with just indignation, eloquently expressed " the Feelings of a Republican on the Fall of Buonaparte."

> " I hated thee, fallen tyrant! I did groan
> To think that a most *unambitious slave*,
> Like thou, shouldst dance and revel *on the grave*
> Of Liberty."

The sad contrast between what was and what might have been added poignancy to his sorrow. The poet lamented—

> " Thou mightst have built thy throne
> Where it had stood even now: thou didst prefer
> A *frail and bloody pomp* which Time has swept
> In fragments towards oblivion."

It was, therefore only natural that in Argolis, there should be no such sorry spectacle of tyranny broad-based on popular support; of virtue crushed by the lure of power and glory. For the poet had known only too late

> " That virtue owns a more eternal foe
> Than Force or Fraud: old Custom, legal crime
> And bloody Faith, the foulest birth of Time." *

Accordingly he erased from the tablets of his memory one entire period of French History and proceeded to depict the return of the tyrant to his vacant throne. Like Louis XVIII of France,

> " The Tyrant passed, surrounded by the steel
> Of hired assassins, through the public way,
> Choked with his country's dead." †

* Shelley, The Feelings of a Republican on the Fall of Buonaparte.
† Revolt of Islam, X. vii.
† Revolt of Islam, X, vii.

The exultation of triumphant Autocracy, its vindictiveness, its persecutions, its callous indifference to the sufferings of its victims are all strongly reminiscent of the Bourbonic régimé after the Restoration.* Peace reigned in the country indeed but it was the peace of death. Shelley was very careful to describe the condition of Argolis after the return of the tyrant and the picture he painted shows interesting points of resemblance with that of France at a similar period of her history. There was the same ruthless suppression of revolutionaries, the same fear of betrayal and the same orgies of rejoicings.

" Peace in the desert fields and villages,
Between the glutted beasts and mangled dead!
Peace in the silent streets! save when the cries
Of victims to their fiery judgement led,
Made pale their voiceless lips who seemed to dread
Even their dearest kindred, lest some tongue
Be faithless to the fear yet unbetrayed;
Peace in the Tyrant's palace, where the throng
Waste the triumphal hours in festival and song." †

There was desolation in the realm of France. The long periods of war had denuded the country of its riches. The civil war had ruined some of its most prosperous provinces while the invading forces devastated the regions through which they passed. As early as August 13, 1814, Shelley wrote to his wife, Harriet, " the last two days we passed over the country that was the seat of war. I cannot describe to you the frightful desolation of this scene : village after village entirely ruined and burned, the white ruins towering in innumerable forms of destruction among the beautiful trees. The inhabitants were famished ; families once independent now beg their bread in this wretched country ; no provisions ; no accommodation ; filth, misery and famine everywhere." He had this miserable scene in his mind when, in his *Preface*

* *Cf.* Revolt of Islam, V, viii-xi.
† *Ibid.*, V, xvii.

to the *Revolt of Islam*, he admitted to " have seen the theatre of the more visible ravages of tyranny and war ; cities and villages reduced to scattered groups of black and roofless houses and the naked inhabitants sitting famished upon their desolated thresholds." In Argolis also, the whole country was similarly devastated. The " few, lone " ears of corn were destroyed. The parching air dried up all moisture ; " beasts, birds and insects " were carried away in their thousands. Famine stalked in the realm and an unknown fear, a vague sickening dread, suddenly fell upon its inhabitants, sinking deep into their hearts and destroying the very foundations of their personality. The entire scene is only an imaginaive, and consequently heightened reconstruction of what the poet himself saw during his journey across France.

" There was no food, the corn was trampled down
The flocks and herds had perished; on the shore
The dead and putrid fish were ever thrown;
The deeps were foodless, and the winds no more
Creaked with the weight of birds, but, as before
Those winged things sprang forth, were void of shade;
The vines and orchards, Autumn's golden store,
Were burned;—so that the meanest food was weighed
With gold, and Avarice died before the God it made."*

The *Revolt of Islam* is thus replete with reminiscences of the revolutionary movement in France. The most striking episodes of the epic, are closely modelled on similar events in French history while its atmosphere of thought and action is redolent of French society during the greatest upheaval of its history. It will, however, be quite erroneous to regard the poem itself as a mere record of the incidents of the French Revolution. Shelley went to France for his materials indeed ; but these materials were transmuted by his imagination before they were enshrined in his poetry. The facts of

* Revolt of Islam, X, xviii.

the Revolution were mere data for creating the ideal world of his imagination. Shelley did not want to write history, nor formulate any political theory. He was a poet and his object was plainly to compose " a poem, in the cause of a liberal and comprehensive morality." He wanted to create " beautiful idealisms of moral excellence," and fervently hoped that his creations might instil into the mind of his readers " a virtuous enthusiasm for doctrines of liberty and justice." Accordingly the poet brooded over these incidents and sought out their true significance in the history of mankind. They stirred his emotions, and through their influence, there gradually grew up before him visions of the future of humanity, of revolutions uncontaminated by bloody excesses. These vague and indefinite shapes became definite and distinct ; they floated before the poet's eye demanding expression and the result was the magnificent imaginative world of the *Revolt of Islam*.

6

Conclusion.

From a critical study of the works of Shelley it is apparent that the poet was, very early in life, attracted by the French Revolution. It seemed to him to be a distinct and significant stage in the development of human nature ; and he, consequently, studied its different aspects with great care and insight. His knowledge of the gradual stages in the progress of this great upheaval was so accurate that in his critical estimate of the revolution, the poet always revealed its true significance. He could give a vivid and truthful description of pre-revolutionary France, her social iniquities, her religious intolerance and her political absolutism. The alternations of joy and fear, and the intellectual ferment which characterised her inhabitants during this critical period of her history also attracted his attention. He could appreciate the ardour of the revolution, the disinterested enthusiasm of its leaders and at the same time point out, with an unerring finger, the blemishes and defects which brought about its

failure. The apparent desolation of all hopes for the future redemption of Humanity could not crush him down; on the contrary, the revolutionary movement itself appeared before his mind's eye, in its true colours, as both a warning and a sign of promise.

His poems were highly coloured by his studies of the revolutionary movement in France. His descriptions of the misery of the poor, the oppression of the rich, the tyranny of Princes and Prelates, were all reminiscent of the French Revolution. Even when he sought to create imaginary realms of fancy the state of French society always stood in the background of his mind. The episodes he depicted were remarkable in their resemblance to similar events in French history. His Argolis and the world he pictured in *Queen Mab* can very often be mistaken for the Paris of the XVIII century. Yet, in spite of these close similarities, the shaping power of his imagination transformed the materials afforded by the French Revolution; his inspiration created out of them a world which, underneath superficial resemblances, showed signs of an essential difference. His political theories, his individualistic vision of the Human Millennium all influenced his poetry and differentiated it from actual facts of history. In several of the characters of his poems we discern the typical hero of the revolutionary movement, with his hopes and fears, his enthusiasm and bitter disillusionment. But even in them we observe characteristics which are more in conformity with the ideals of the poet than with actual personalities of history. The pacific tendency of Shelley's thought, his predilection for the doctrine of non-resistance made his characters tolerant even in the midst of popular frenzy. They were never carried away by the swift currents of thought prevalent in their age; the passions of the revolutionary movement could never touch them; on the contrary, they stood steadfast in their conviction and always sought to guide popular activities into channels of ordered progress. In several of them again, we have a suspicion that the poet was expressing, by way of contrast, his considered opinion regarding the excesses of the revolutionary movement.

The years 1810 to 1817 marked the period when the influence of the French Revolution was the strongest on the mind of Shelley. The numerous references to the movement in his letters and pamphlets, the many critical analyses of its merits and defects, its mission and significance, that we find introduced by way of warning or encouragement in his *Addresses to the Irish People* or his *Proposals for an Association of Philanthropists* or his *Preface* to the *Revolt of Islam* show that he was, all this time, under the influence of the revolutionary movement in France. His youthful outbursts in favour of regicides and enthusiasts, his descriptions of incidents closely approximating to events in France, all point to the same direction. In fact the *Revolt of Islam* is, to a very great extent, the result of his studies of the French Revolution and as such marks a distinct stage in the development of his mind.

In course of time this interest in past history and the inspiration derived therefrom found a natural outflow into contemporary events of a similar nature. Shelley's later poems celebrated the liberation of Greece, Naples or Spain. The efforts of patriots to break off the shackles of despotism in contemporary Europe inspired him with glorious visions. The French Revolution itself receded to the background—and it is a very significant fact that the only reference to its events in *Prometheus Unbound* has little organic relationship with the development of its plot. Shelley no longer lived in the past; he was now an ardent student of the present.

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